



RUTH IRVING
M.D.



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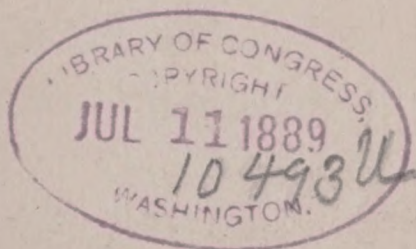




RUTH IRVING, M.D.

BY

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PREFACE.

THE manuscript is completed ; to-morrow it goes to the publishers—from them to the world. Friends may speak in its praise or in blame, but I shall miss one voice : it was silenced in a Western grave. So I send out this little story in memory of the noble brother who taught my hand to write for God and truth.

THE AUTHOR.

RUTH IRVING, M. D.

CHAPTER I.

WESTERN LIFE.

“The noblest in the old-time fight
Matched not the humblest here that falls,
And never were there won such scars
As these, won in these nobler wars—
These bloodless wars that bring not pain,
These priceless victories of Peace,
Where Pride is slain and Self is slain,
Where Patience has her victories.”

A PRAIRIE-PICTURE is one of grand perspective. There are broad stretches of level, swelling mounds, dimpled nests of dainty grasses. Oh the wonderful growth of the grasses in whose protecting shadows birds find safe and pleasant homes! Storm-worn bluffs guard lazy rivers fringed with wild plum trees or low-bending willows. Over all bends a sky of clearest, purest blue,

and the red men on their swift ponies rush across the plains in pursuit of the abundant game of this the land of their fathers. All this was in history's yesterday, for the relentless hand of Anglo-Saxon energy has laid hold on this goodly land, and, crushing all who stand in the way, will subdue it. The old tragedy of conquest is being repeated; again in the graves of a failing race will be laid the foundations of another race's glory.

In this land of bustle and change there are growing up a manhood and a womanhood which are unknown in any other part of the world. Here the word "neighbor" comes very near to bearing its Christian meaning; here the Easterner, the Southerner, the English, the Danish, the Swedish, the Irish, the German, the French, the Italian, and every other race under the sun, must coalesce and form a new race simply and broadly American. The red man, the black man and the little yellow man from over the Pacific will have much to say as to the smoothness with which those forces unite.

Where the free, wild prairies and the time-worn bluffs shone in the Nebraska sunlight, stands to-day the rushing, busy city of Omaha, the future queen of the West. In Western life the survival of the

fittest means the survival of the strongest in bone and muscle, brain and nerve, "sand and cheek." The last qualities are characteristic of American success. The failures are hid as surely in the surge of Western life as though they had been sunk in the Missouri. Life here is a medley in which is found every relation, condition, mood and tense of men and things.

A second-story front room on North Sixteenth street was a medley, and a pleasing one withal. It was large and well favored with windows, where on pleasant days the brilliant Nebraska sunlight came in floods. Sunlight will of itself almost furnish a room. This one owed none of its cheeriness to sunlight, however, for the windows revealed only an unusually active blizzard.

Still, the room was cheery. The carpet, of soft golden browns, and the easy-chairs seemed made and purchased for use. A shaded lamp stood in the centre of the table; books and papers were lying all about. Indeed, there were books in almost every possible place. On the walls hung a diploma and two ink-portraits—one of noble, loyal manhood, the other of a tender womanly face. The dainty work-basket and the evident effort to make a little

go a great way told that a home-loving woman had to do with the room. The half-opened curtains of a doorway revealed the holy of holies of the place; a white bed and a tasteful dressing-bureau, on which were a lady's collar and a case of surgical instruments in close companionship, told the story of a professional woman's home.

A young girl sat in an easy-chair before a large coal-heating stove. She was below the medium height, slightly but strongly framed. She had an earnest face from which looked out a pair of eyes of that peculiar shade of brown which indicates courage and firmness of character. Her toilet, though neat, had every appearance of having been made in a hurry. Her manner was that of one who, weary and resting, is still ready for instant action.

The early winter twilight, helped by the blinding snow, shut swiftly down. The girl rose and walked to the window; she stood for a moment looking out on the gathering night. How the snow flew and blew! It seemed as though it had taken out a contract to travel by the league and was in a hurry to be done with it. People slid, rushed and were blown about as only Western people ever are rushed and

blown. Weary of watching, the girl gave the stove a vigorous shaking down and then lighted the lamp. The bright glow increased the cheeriness of the room and made radiant such a face as one would wish to go home to after a stormy day. It is a pleasure to see such a face across the breakfast-table even if one has seen it there every morning for ten years. She lighted the lamp and talked to herself meanwhile—a thing she was not in the habit of doing. She—Ruth Irving—talked in this fashion :

“I wish the Doctor would come ! The slate says, ‘Be back at four-thirty ;’ it must be nearly five now. Yes ; there is the Union Pacific whistle, and—here is the Doctor too,” she added, joyfully, as she ran to the door and half smothered the figure there with the warmth of her greeting.

“Home again, Doctor !” she cried. “I know you are glad to see me. Are you almost frozen ? Let me unfasten your cloak. I have been waiting here two long hours, and they have seemed longer than all the time I have been away.”

“I am very glad to see you, Ruthie,” said the Doctor as Ruth’s nimble fingers unfastened the cloak.

The modern servant of *Æsculapius* gave herself

a thorough shaking, sending little particles of snow in every direction.

The Doctor placed her medicine-case on the table and seated herself to warm her feet, while Ruth hung the hat and cloak on the hooks behind the door and then bustled around to find warm slippers, all the while plying the Doctor with questions both grave and gay. At last the Doctor—otherwise known as “Miss Helen A. Ross, M. D.”—had a chance to speak.

“How have you been, Ruth?” she asked. “Are you not worn out? I was absent when you were called away, but your note said you nursed for Dr. Smith. Has your patient recovered?”

“Of course my patient recovered! She took dinner with the family to-day. Case was pneumonia; nervous too. She wanted me to earn my money. She slept well, however; so I am quite rested. How has the suffering world treated *you*?” Ruth asked, as she noticed that Dr. Ross looked pale and worn.

“I have no cause for complaint,” said the Doctor. “I have done much street-car riding; I have taken many long walks for the good of the humans and my purse; I have had some sleepless nights,

and I believe sleepless nights are symptoms of success in my profession ; I have met very pleasant people in my new calls. Ruthie, what about supper ?”

“ I suppose we shall go to the boarding-house,” Ruth replied as she thoughtfully surveyed the under side of her dress-sleeve.

“ I suppose we will not,” said the Doctor, decidedly ; “ we pay twenty-five cents for every meal we eat in that house. Now, I have crackers, butter, pepper and salt ; half a pint of oysters will be just about one dime. We will have an oyster-stew in our room to-night.”

“ Been taking a course in domestic economy ?” asked Ruth, with a quick, gay laugh. Those quick, bright laughs were some of “ her ways,” and ways which were very dear to her friends.

“ I want a horse and buggy ;” and the Doctor joined in the laughter.

“ I never cry for the moon ;” and Ruth’s face suddenly became very sober.

“ I do,” laughed the Doctor. “ I have cried for every one of the heavenly bodies, separately and collectively, save and excepting the sun. Now I want the Big Dipper. What a help that bright star-

spangled Big Dipper of my ambition—otherwise a horse and buggy—would be to me !”

“I am a self-appointed committee on oysters,” cried Ruth ; and she quickly began to put on her cloak. Then, with “Fortune favors the brave” by way of farewell, she started on her errand.

The young girl ran lightly along the snow-blown streets. The wind tugged at every fold of her clothing, but she did not mind it. Hers had not been a sheltered life ; she was used to activity and to struggles that were more disheartening than was a Nebraska blizzard.

CHAPTER II.

HER FATHER'S SIGN.

“One of the workers of the world
Living toiled, and toiling died;
But others worked, and the work went on
And was not changed when he was gone.
A strong arm stricken, a wide sail furled,
And only a few men sighed.”

HELEN ROSS had been blessed with a healthy, happy childhood. Her father had been a hard-working doctor in Illinois; he had been a man who seemed to have some talent for everything besides making and keeping money. His practice had been large, but he had not been a good collector: it went much against his kindly nature to dun a poor patient. It seemed that all the poor people in that town employed him. He had been a firm friend; troubled souls looked to him for help, and always found it. His tastes in general and professional reading, good pictures, and the like, were far beyond his means. Helen's

mother had been a gentle home-woman who worked those kitchen and sewing-room miracles whereby a family is made to live in comfort on a small amount of money and the products of a good garden.

So things had gone on until Helen was a merry schoolgirl of sixteen, and the Rosses had never known that they were poor people. Everything considered, they were a very happy family. That summer a fever broke out in Rock Island. Dr. Ross worked faithfully to bring health to other homes, and, as if in revenge, the dreadful disease claimed him for its last victim. It made swift work of burning out the life of the man who had been everybody's friend. Every one was very sorry for the widow and the fatherless. After the manner of the times, every one went to the funeral.

"What was he worth?" people asked as they went home. He was worth so much that many of the world's "successful men" will want to change seats with him at the judgment-day.

"After the funeral"! There is a world of sadness in those words. You who know the dreariness of them remember how the extra chairs had been taken away before you returned from the grave.

Kind friends had tried to make things look just as they had looked before death entered the home. The friends had put one chair partly out of sight, but you could see it all the more plainly. Then the neighbors all went away and left you alone with your sorrow. The world went on just as it had gone last week, but to you it would for ever be different. So it was that the Rosses were left alone. Night settled swiftly down over Rock Island, the river slipped by, and two women looked calmly into the future. Then came the question which always intrudes itself at such times: "What shall we do next?"

Helen went into her father's office. She looked over rows of medical books, she laid her soft fingers on bright horrid-looking instruments for which she knew no name; then she went back to her mother, and, standing in the firelight, said slowly,

"Mamma, I have decided it: I shall be a doctor, just as I always planned to be. Papa was willing; only he thought it would be a hard life for me. Whatever else we sell, we must keep papa's books."

The mother answered encouragingly. Together they looked into the future and dreamed of the time when Helen might write her name as her

father had done. Nor was this decision hasty. From her babyhood Helen had taken a deep interest in her father's work and talked of the time when she herself should be a doctor. Many were the dolls, kittens, toads and insects she had subjected to vigorous treatment for diseases which no one but herself understood. As they had ridden over the bright Illinois prairie, father and daughter had talked of studying medicine, and the father—wiser than he knew—had given the daughter many helpful hints.

It was not time then for Helen to begin her professional studies—other branches must be taken up first—and mother and daughter set bravely to work. Though frail in body, Mrs. Ross had been her husband's companion and *confidante*. Her rare intelligence enabled her to keep a general idea of her husband's work, though she never dreamed of a profession for herself. It was a hard life, but they worked patiently and bravely, sewing, teaching, doing fancy-work—anything by which they could earn money. Plain clothes, worn boots and oft-times no best dress at all comprised their wearing-apparel. They ate cheap food.

At the age of twenty-four Helen was graduated

from the medical college. She had earned the right to the dear old sign—her father's name and hers :

H. A. ROSS, M. D.

They moved to Omaha, rented two rooms and put up the father's sign. Patients came slowly. All young doctors find it so. People will employ experienced physicians, and experience does not come safely sealed in dollar bottles.

Mrs. Ross and her daughter were hopeful from force of habit, and the future was very bright. At the end of the first year both ends met, but no amount of saving could make them lap one dollar's worth. And who shall say how many times these people had dined off mush and milk?

Dr. Ross became known. An enthusiast in her profession, she carried hope and courage into sick-rooms. Life grew full and bright. Success grew certain. Then Mrs. Ross suffered from an old heart-trouble. Her daughter worked with the zeal of desperation ; she called in the best counsel the city afforded, but it was of no use. In a few hours

the young doctor learned the weakness of human skill, for she was motherless.

The profession which while the mother lived had seemed so bright and dear took color from the artist who paints only in gray shadows. Science is a hard thing when it is all one has to live for. But Helen Ross had lived and gone about her work bravely and well. For a year after her mother died she was alone; then she met Ruth Irving. The girl's bright ways were a comfort to the saddened woman who longed for sunshine and cheery laughter. The two women planned to live together. Ruth moved her few worldly goods to the pleasant rooms on Sixteenth street, and Helen Ross welcomed her home after each new case as she did that stormy night.

Ruth regarded the Doctor as experienced and almost middle-aged; the Doctor knew Ruth was womanly beyond her years. Dr. Ross knew that Ruth's foster-parents had died three years before, and that in nursing Mrs. Irving the girl had shown wonderful skill. Her deft ways did not escape the sharp eyes of the attending physician. When the mother no longer needed her care, Ruth found work in other homes; now she had become favorably known as a nurse.

CHAPTER III.

PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS.

“Strength for to-day that the weary hearts
In the battle of life may fail not,
And the eyes bedimmed with bitter tears
In their search for light may fail not.”

SO, with mind intent on buying oysters, Ruth was blown along the street toward the nearest grocery.

A Western grocery is a school of modern languages taught by natural methods. Busy clerks do up butter and baking-powder in half a dozen tongues, for every food-emporium is supposed to keep that number on hand and ready for instant use. On Saturday a small Babel is let loose, for all speak with different tongues, while you make frantic efforts to remember your own native language. Ruth aired her newly-acquired Swedish in asking for the oysters; for if we must teach our language to millions of foreigners every year, why should not they, in turn, teach us their jargon?

The little winged wretch who has made trouble for young people ever since the wedding in Eden was abroad that night. To his other sins be it added that he caused Roy Ford to look in at the window as he passed the grocery. Had Dr. Ross and Ruth Irving taken supper at the boarding-house, this same Roy Ford would have been seated near them ; he would have seen that they lacked no good thing, and Ruth would have been very happy. Dr. Ross would have looked on and been troubled as she discovered the premonitory symptoms of a disease which no medical man or woman can fully diagnose.

Dr. Ross did not like Roy Ford ; she knew he was of the genus *Fast*—at least, he was as much so as his salary and credit would allow. She knew he would be of no lasting good to Ruth Irving ; but when he chose he could be very agreeable and fascinating. Dr. Ross was a wise woman. She breathed no word of all this knowledge to Ruth lest in a fit of girlish resentment she should rise from mere liking into love. Yes, rise into love ; for, whatever the object of the love, pure, true human love is an elevation to the soul which is exercised thereby. The wily Doctor treated the young man

cordially and prayed that he might go West, being herself a good Providence to Ruth in that she saw him as little as possible. Still, Ruth admired Roy Ford—why, no scientific man can explain.

Instead of the chat at the supper-table, Mr. Ford walked home through the storm with Ruth.

“‘It vas von pig plizzard,’ saith Yon Yonson,” Ruth remarked as she brought in the oysters and a gust of cold air. She said no word of Roy Ford. Why?

Dr. Ross, left alone, had not been idle. The books and papers were gone from the table, and snow-white napkins covered the bright cloth; the dishes were arranged for the little supper. Something was bubbling in the small tin kettle on the back of the Garland stove. Dr. Ross deftly slipped the oysters into the kettle, and Ruth sat watching her as she dipped the steaming soup into plates. It was a pleasure to watch the Doctor; there is always a sort of fascination in the movements of trained human hands.

“I hope people will kindly remain healthy to-night,” said Ruth as they took their places at the table. “This is the worst storm of the season, and I do not wish to be called out in it.”

"It is also the first storm of the season," said Dr. Ross, with a smile.

"I know," Ruth replied; "but this one is so severe that it seems as though we were in the middle of winter instead of being scarcely in December. Now, Doctor, I find that we each have saved fifteen cents by this oyster-stew. Query: How long will it take you to save your horse and buggy and me to save my way through college?"

"I hope to have my horse in the spring," returned the Doctor; "I did not know that you thought of a college education. I was eight years in earning my medical education."

"Sometimes I think of it, and sometimes I don't." Ruth laughed, and then she changed the subject: "When I first knew you, I used to try to fancy you about household tasks, but the picture never would be perfect until I really saw you perform them."

"Why not?" Dr. Ross inquired, looking up.

"Because. A woman's reason. I suppose it was because of the two letters which you write after your name."

"I never expected to hear such a speech as that from you, Ruth Irving. Why, you are almost a

professional woman yourself. Does my profession make me any the less womanly?"

Two bright spots glowed on the Doctor's cheeks. This was a sore subject. Her gentle mother had been her ideal woman, and she dreaded lest her own contact with the world should make her grow away from that type of womanhood.

"No, indeed!" laughed Ruth. "You are safely anchored to this truth: 'To be womanly is the greatest charm of woman.' But about the profession. It is this way: I want something more than I have. I feel so alone! I seem so cut loose from my work when I get home from each case! I am not a trained nurse; like many others, I have taken up this work because I have a knack for it, and because I can earn more by it than by any other work which I can do. I am very young; difficult cases want a more experienced nurse. I was idle some time before this last case, and I have a presentiment that this will be a fearfully healthy winter."

"Ruth, your vocation may be speechmaking," said the Doctor, laughing. "Besides, presentiments do not count in this matter-of-fact age; realities are what we deal with. Let me help you to more of

this soup ; it is very good. But, Ruthie, I thought that you never borrowed trouble?"

"Why, Doctor, I don't—that is, I don't very often," said Ruth. "But, some way, I am very much stirred up to-day. I have been in an atmosphere of interrogation-points for three weeks ; I feel that my little island of life is in danger of sinking from sight."

"That is not a good comparison," said the Doctor ; "life should be compared to a stream. I think it more than likely that yours will be merged into that of another."

Ruth's face flushed as she thought of the words out in the storm. She wondered why she had not spoken of Mr. Ford, but she had not, and surely she did not wish to begin at that moment. So she answered :

"I suppose your simile was intended to represent matrimony. Let us lay aside poetry and romance while we resort to figures. The *London Truth* is responsible for this statement." She drew from her pocket a scrap of newspaper. "'There are nine hundred and forty-eight thousand more women than men in Great Britain.'"

"American census-takers are too polite to tell us

that we are supernumerary here," was the Doctor's comment. "Ruth, what do you argue from those figures?"

"I only read it as a comment on the 'woman question' and the relation it bears to our work. I suppose that editor would count us among the surplus women."

"I suppose he would," said the Doctor, quietly. "What is it now?" she asked; for Ruth laughed gayly.

"You should see the second-girl with whom I have had to do since I have been gone. What are we going to do with all the foreigners that are pouring in upon us?"

"I don't know, Ruthie," the Doctor answered, slowly; "it is a serious question. Few Americans realize the state of things. Every *ism*—almost every religion—is represented right here in Omaha. Dr. Austin Phelps says, 'Five hundred years of time in the process of the world's salvation may depend on the next twenty years of United States history.'"

"Say five hundred years of time in the world's civilization, and I shall be satisfied," Ruth responded, quickly.

"What about the second-girl?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh, Doctor, her ideas were so funny!" and Ruth laughed again. "I asked her what dainty she would like for Thanksgiving, and she said, 'Some beer and some bologna-sausage.' What would the stern old Pilgrims have said to such a Thanksgiving? But that is the 'German vote,' as the politicians say. She told me that she was soon to marry a young German; the next generation will be just like them, only they will be native-born Americans. What is going to be done about it? The cook was a Swede; the coachman, a negro. Yesterday they all quarreled. I went to the kitchen to see what the trouble was about, and the cook cried, 'Germany, Sweden and Africa are fighting; America come make peace.' That is just it: we must make peace or be torn in pieces."

"There are several things which might be done," said the Doctor, thoughtfully. "I should prescribe the best reconciling power that I know of—the gospel of Jesus Christ."

"But, Doctor my dear, you know I do not believe in that gospel," Ruth objected.

Dr. Ross lived her religion every day of her life,

but she never argued it. She looked thoughtful for a moment, and then changed the subject :

“Ruth, I am tired of being ‘Doctored’ *all* the time ; can’t you manage to say ‘Helen’ ?”

“I don’t know, Doctor. • There it is again ! I am not used to it. There are so few whom I have a right to call by their Christian names.”

“I give you the right to call me ‘Helen,’ and I shall feel hurt if you do not do so.”

The signs of the little supper had been obliterated ; the room was in its pretty sitting-room order, and these two of the world’s workers sat and rested. It was well-earned rest. They held a long conference on subjects which are dear to women, but which no man can comprehend. Every minute was doubly enjoyed because both knew it was only of free grace that the doorbell did not ring. Both had learned the secret of resting between the heart-beats, and so made the most of every minute.

Ruth, who had gone so hardily on her way that night and been brought back with such tender care, felt safe and rested in her heart’s core. Oh, sheltered womanhood, to whom love and tender care are as common as the air you breathe, remember Ruth

Irving spent her life in waiting on and watching over others. Her eyes must be quick to see danger, her hands quick to shield some one else's darling. The moments when she was watched and cared for were few and far between. She was just nineteen, and her heart felt a woman's need of love. No wonder there was a tender light in her eyes and the world seemed very fair to her even in the teeth of a Nebraska blizzard. But why did she not say, "I met Mr. Ford on the street to-night, and he walked home with me ? She had said nothing of him when she first returned, and every moment made it harder to begin. There was what was termed "an understanding" between those two young people—most certainly, Ruth had ample cause for such an understanding—but there was no engagement to be announced. Such a state of things is very hard to explain to an unsympathetic listener.

Dr. Ross was no anomaly that she should take no interest in a love-affair; moreover, this fair girl was very dear to her. The Doctor would have blessed Ruth and given her to one worthy of her, and thanked the Lord that there were two strong arms between this girl and the wicked world; but

Roy Ford was not the man to share these blessings. He never would be unless he reformed and led a very different life.

So Ruth went on peering into the future; she tried to settle those questions of life and fate which are for ever unsettled. All the while the quiet woman before her wondered at this mood, so new to Ruth Irving.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPIRIT OF BEAUTY AND THE CHRISTIAN'S GOD.

“They who keep their best affections young
Best love the beautiful.”

“**W**HEN it's good, it's very, very good ; and when it's bad, it's horrid.” That is the way with Nebraska weather. I have introduced you to a blizzard, but you must not think that it will last all winter. No ; the storm will stay three days, and then will go away. Over the wide prairies will be spread the fairest winter sky in all the world. The plains will be bathed in a brilliant sunshine, while every breath of air will be like an inspiration.

The storm still raged when the morning came. The wind tossed the snow just as it had done when Ruth watched for her friend's coming. Dr. Ross and Ruth Irving were of that class of workers to whom sleep is vouchsafed at uncertain intervals. They loyally did the duty nearest them and settled

all neglected accounts with Morpheus. It was nearly noon when they rose to the light of another stormy day. Their eyes were clear, their nerves steady, their bodies rested; they were ready for any demand from the world of suffering. They were early at the boarding-house dinner-table. This house was half boarding-house, half hotel. It was more useful than elegant. There were many transient boarders; some came there for dinner only. Some people took their meals at this house because it was less trouble to go there than anywhere else.

Many hungry people gathered in the long dining-room that stormy Sunday. The greeting between Roy Ford and Ruth Irving was very quiet. Talk went on by fits and starts. People were there for the highly-laudable purpose of eating dinner, not to bless themselves with the society of the other lights. They said what they liked, and the fitness of things remained unchanged if one kept silence.

"Mr. Norman, have you attended church to-day?" asked Mr. Ford as the gentleman addressed seated himself at the table.

"I have," was the quiet reply; whereat there was much exclaiming.

"I am surprised," said Mr. Ford. "This is a severe storm."

"I went to my office yesterday," said Mr. Norman, smiling. "Should I not serve my God as faithfully as I serve the almighty dollar?"

"Perhaps you should," said Mr. Ford, eagerly, "but, so far as I know, that would be a new suggestion to most Christians."

Mr. Ford smiled, well satisfied at having started what he was pleased to term a "religious discussion."

"Do you think you served God by fighting a storm just to hear a sermon?" Ruth asked.

"I think so," replied Mr. Norman. "I certainly worshiped God."

"I wonder who else did likewise?" Ruth observed as she glanced around the table.

"I did," said Mr. Ford.

"What! did you attend church?" came in surprised tones from one who appeared to take no interest in the talk.

"I said that I worshiped," Mr. Ford explained. "My form of worship differs from Mr. Norman's."

Then Miss Gleason spoke up:

"I have heard that most people leave their

religion on the eastern side of the Mississippi when they come West ; this looks very much that way. Here is one man who owns to having worshiped God—one who worshiped he knows not what.—I wonder how many people there are in this room ?”

“ You must remember that the returns are not all in yet,” said Mr. Norman.

“ Also that work sometimes means worship,” Dr. Ross quietly added.

“ That reminds me of a subject over which I have long wondered,” said Miss Gleason, forgetting her counting. “ It is this : Do doctors ever repeat the Lord’s Prayer ? If so, there is one petition which sounds very much as though they prayed that people might be made sick : ‘ Give us this day our daily bread.’ ” Her voice took a touch of reverence, in spite of the jesting tones.

“ Indeed it does not,” said Dr. Ross, quickly. “ We know there will be sickness and suffering ; we ask that we may be permitted to relieve some of it.”

“ Well answered, Dr. Ross !” said Mr. Ford “ But I do not believe prayer has much to do with bread.”

“ Do you believe in God ?” Mr. Norman asked.

"Not in your sort of a God," replied Mr. Ford.

"What sort of a God do you believe in?"

"Why," said Mr. Ford, "you Christians talk about an all-powerful God. Look at the misery in this city. If your God is good, he is not powerful, or he would not permit so much suffering. I worship the Spirit of Beauty; you find it in the starlit night, in the wide prairies. There is more to worship in a single wild rose 'way out on the prairies than in the God you talk about."

"How so?" inquired Mr. Norman, not in the least startled by the statement.

"It is beautiful, sweet and pure; your God is terrible. The Spirit of Beauty is greater than the Christian's God, and that is just as sure as that water runs down hill."

"If you study the subject, I think you will find that a great amount of water runs up hill," said Mr. Norman, smiling as he spoke.

"God is not terrible to his followers," said Dr. Ross, ignoring the natural tendency of water.

"That is just it," went on the young man, who thought wisdom pure and undefiled was flowing from his lips. "Your God is partial. One of his creatures he sends to bliss; another, to unend-

ing misery. Don't talk to me of a God who will separate a family."

Roy Ford leaned back in his chair with the air of a man who has made an original and praiseworthy remark. He was one of those people who are pleased to term themselves liberal and free-thinkers; their much-worn statements as to goodness and purity meet us at every turn. Instead of being liberal, they take the narrowest view of the "great I Am."

All the people at the table had heard these remarks before, and all were too much interested in other matters to care to prolong the conversation; but Mr. Ford continued his confession of faith:

"I worship the wind and the storm, the Spirit of Strength and Beauty, the Spirit of the Prairies. Ah! that is what you need. You ought to get full of the Spirit of the Prairies. Yes; the Spirit of Beauty is greater than the Christian's God."

"What do you name this spirit?" asked Mr. Norman.

"I call it Fate," was the answer.

"'Fate'! Well, that is a good name for it," said Mr. Norman, thoughtfully. "But you are on mythological ground there, and you must be guided

by the laws of mythology. Even in the palmiest days of Greek mythology it was recognized that Fate was only a sort of secondary power, and was subject to a mysterious over-power for which they knew no name. Now, an old book tells me that this power should be called 'Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.' That is the Power I went through the storm to worship this morning."

"But you don't answer my arguments; you can't argue on this subject," cried Mr. Ford.

"I have heard no arguments. You have told me what you think and believe; that will not answer. In a court of law you take oath to what you know, and I say I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Truth is always the same, and human need the same. To-day the Western lawyer frames his thought in the language of the patient man of the land of Uz. Some way, Mr. Ford was glad when that dinner was over.

If there was any one thing that Ruth Irving worshiped, it was strength. Of all things, she desired to be independent. Mr. Ford seemed very independent; she thought he talked like a man who

was very strong. There had been little time in her life for studying such subjects ; she resolutely bore her own burdens, and gave no thought to the “ Man of sorrows.” Helen Ross lived a religion pure and undefiled. That much Ruth knew ; for the rest, she had lived all her life among free-thinkers.

O free-thinkers, prophets of nothing, and you who worship the Spirit of Beauty, the Christian’s God looked down on the bright prairies and saw that they were good, yet he scattered countless wild roses to make sweet the radiant air, the glory of which is as the breath of his nostrils. The Spirit of Beauty is the thought of the Lord God almighty.

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

“That man will guard where he did bind
Is hope for unknown years.”

ROY FORD walked home with Dr. Ross and Ruth Irving; he said it was very imprudent for ladies to venture out in such “beastly weather.” That original remark was received by the ladies with withering derision. What were they better than others of their kind and calling? They declared that they enjoyed a blizzard; it is a tonic, and as a rest is more to be desired than a picnic. Their glowing cheeks added strong testimony in favor of their laughing declarations.

Yes; Mr. Ford would lay aside his overcoat. He seated himself with the air of a man who intends to stay. The three talked of little nothings which are bright and interesting at the time, but which only two of any company can remember for ten

minutes. To the two, such nothings are frequently more enduring than is any truth of philosophy.

Dr. Ross donned her cloak and wrapped her head in a dainty hood and thick veil ; she assured her friends that some of her patients must be seen, no matter how the storm behaved. She received many laughing cautions and suggestions as to the best course to take in case she should be blown away ; then she bade them a laughing "Good-bye," while in her heart she wished that Roy Ford was in Greenland. Not that she feared to leave Ruth without a chaperon while she entertained gentleman-friends. This was in the earlier days of Omaha ; to that generation a chaperon was an unnecessary luxury. Besides all this, Ruth Irving was much used to taking care of herself. How Dr. Ross did dislike Roy Ford ! It required all her tact to avoid letting Ruth know it. The more she disliked him, the more anxious she was not to offend Ruth. On the whole, Helen A. Ross, M. D., was as miserable as people who meddle in affairs of that kind usually are.

Roy Ford loved the young nurse, with her cheery ways and merry laugh, as much as was in his nature to love any woman. His nature was too shallow

for an unselfish love ; therefore he was attracted to Ruth, with her steadfast heart and strong, loving endurance. Roy Ford was poor. He told the "boys" that he was too poor to marry, and that he was not a marrying-man ; but, just the same, he told the old, old story—old as Eden, yet sweet and new to every passing generation. He told it well, and Ruth, listening, thought no woman was so blest as she. Of all men the one before her seemed the most worthy of the best and purest that a woman can give. Girls always have an ideal manhood ; Ruth thought hers was named Roy Ford. That afternoon she enjoyed a season of unmixed bliss. Will the memory of it help her bear her burdens if the fond lover ever proves to be an indifferent husband ?

Mr. Ford was night-superintendent in one of the many industries which in the mad race for money are kept going nights and Sundays. In the early twilight he went back to his business, and left Ruth alone with her dreams of the future. Her pulses throbbed steadily. What had become of the puzzling questions of twenty-four hours ago ? They were all answered in the one name "Roy Ford." The girl smiled as she patted the finger

which was to wear the shining token of the best gift of God—the God she would not own. It was the same world, the same room, and the same storm raged without, while the fire needed shaking down as it had done the night before ; but all was very different.

Ruth attended to the fire and watched in the twilight for her friend's coming ; her greeting was as warm as it had been the night before.

“Don't light a lamp, Ruth ; let us sit in the firelight, as we used to do at home. I have longed for this hour all day ; it seems to bring my mother nearer.”

The portraits on the wall showed dimly ; perhaps the dimness made them seem more real. You who sometimes suddenly enter a dimly-lighted room where you have hung the picture of a dear one gone up higher will understand how in the half-light the lips seem just parting for a loving word. We stretch out our hands, and then we remember that we have only the picture.

“I will tell her now,” Ruth thought. “Surely, if her heart longs for her loved ones, she will be glad for me.”

Ruth was almost beginning her story, when sweet

and clear rang out the words of that familiar gospel hymn "Jesus Only." Dr. Ross was one of God's sweet singers—not great nor powerful, but sweet. She could touch her hearers' hearts, for she lived as well as sang the love of the Son of God whom Roy Ford had reviled that day at the dinner-table. Ruth knew all this; respect for Helen Ross kept her tongue from such remarks as those in which Mr. Ford had indulged. Once she had used such words glibly enough, but, whatever she might be willing to do to the Creator of the universe, she would not wound Helen Ross. Ruth dreaded to tell Dr. Ross that she loved a man who denied the Christian's God; then came to her the recollection that she had spoken of the Doctor, and that Mr. Ford had said,

"No matter about telling her; this shall be our little secret."

The girl believed in her lover; she did not stop to remember that he ought to have been proud to have that little secret published to the world's end should she so will. She listened to the sweet, clear singing and asked for one hymn after another, until the singing changed to stories, and the Doctor talked of the old home in Rock Island, of her father and

mother and her healthy, happy childhood. After a time she suddenly asked,

“Ruth, why is it that you never speak of your childhood?”

Ruth had risen, and was walking back and forth in the fire-lighted room; she made no answer, and the Doctor, thinking she did not hear, repeated her question, and added,

“I have no idea where you used to live nor of one single event in your life up to the time your foster-mother died. Most people have moved here from somewhere; so I suppose that you have done the same thing.”

Ruth's eyes blazed as she paused in front of her companion; her voice was harsh and cold as she answered:

“Helen Ross, I never speak of my childhood because I never had a childhood. I was ten years old when Mrs. Irving took me to bring up. Until that time there is not one single memory that I would not blot out if I could. Mrs. Irving was a good woman; she did what she thought her duty by me, but I never had a doll nor a good-night kiss; so don't talk to me of childhood. I don't understand it as you do.”

Ruth moved to the window and laid her cheek against the cold glass. She tried to look out on the storm, but her eyes were blinded by tears. Now, perhaps, you understand something of the sweetness of the passionate words she had heard that afternoon, but why should those bitter memories be awakened at the beginning of her happiness? Dr. Ross watched the girl in amazement. She did not know what to say or what to do; so she wisely did nothing.

The doorbell rang; the Doctor lighted a lamp and opened the door. A voice from the storm asked,

“Is Miss Irving at home?”

“Come in! Who wants me?” asked Ruth as she came forward.

A snowy young giant entered the room and replied:

“A Miss Phelps; she is a teacher, and boards at Mrs. Jewell’s. She was taken sick yesterday, but has grown worse all day; the doctor says that she must have a nurse to-night. It is an awful night, but I beg that you will go with me, for I fear that this girl is very sick. My name is John Anderson, and I also board at Mrs. Jewell’s.” He was a

broad-shouldered, big-hearted man; he could not hide his intense anxiety, nor could he conceal his interest in his fellow-boarder.

"I will be ready in ten minutes," said Ruth as she passed into the inner room.

With the Doctor's help, Ruth placed a few articles in a small satchel; long experience had taught her what she most needed. When she was ready, she said,

"Doctor—I mean Helen—will you tell Mr. Ford that I have been called away? I will send you a note as soon as I can."

Helen Ross put her arms around the young girl and said gently,

"Be my sister, Ruthie. I have always wanted a sister so much!"

"Yes, Helen, I will," said Ruth; and she sealed this covenant with a kiss, as she had done the other covenant a few hours before, while Helen Ross wondered that Ruth had grown so pale when she said to her, "I want a sister so much!"

"I blush for my sex," said Mr. Anderson, "but not a carriage could I get. There will be a street-car along in about ten minutes; so I think that I can take you safely. The red-car line passes our

house." He went to the street door and listened for the tinkle of the car-bell ; soon he gave two sharp whistles, by way of attracting the driver's attention, and ran up the stairs to meet Ruth.

Mr. Anderson took the windward side of the walk, and told Ruth that his huge form must be quite a protection for her small body. Ruth laughed and clung to his arm ; so they fought their way together. Surely, in such a storm, one must walk by faith, and not by sight. The world seemed deluged in moving, stinging snow, through which only the faintest glimmer of the street-lamps was granted them. A sort of instinct guided them to the car ; the few people inside were deploring the fate which compelled them to be abroad on such a night.

Ruth buried her feet in the straw which filled the bottom of the car ; she shivered and drew her extra shawl closer about her. A friendly Swede laid a large shawl across her lap and remarked,

"It is very freeze to-night."

The car did not stir ; surely it was not overloaded, for it contained only eight people. The snow was not deep, but it was blown about with the enterprise characteristic of a Nebraska blizzard, in which the wind acts as a patent double-back-action sieve and

makes the most of a given quantity of snow. The driver's voice was heard in tones of mild persuasion, and soon in tones which were not so mild, while his language became highly figurative.

"Those horses must be of sedentary habits," said Mr. Anderson, trying to be funny while he shivered.

"They are worse than that," replied a hairy object in the corner. Said object was crowned by a Mexican sombrero—sure indication that the wearer was a cowboy by profession and occupation. "Worse than that," he repeated. "The party outside can't manage a broncho. Those horses are balky."

Sounds began to indicate that the point would be contested in a lively manner. The driver indulged in vigorous Western profanity, while the horse executed a lively series of gymnastics with his heels.

"I will step outside and teach the tenderfoot to round up without making the cattle stampede," said the cowboy as he drew off his overcoat and wrapped it about Ruth's shivering form; then, giving his pistol-belt a hitch, he stepped into the storm: "Say, partner, let up on that swearing racket of yours; there is a little girl in that traveling

ice-box. You wait a bit while I quiet your beasts. They wouldn't be human if they didn't act like sin this weather."

The cowboy took the horse by the bit and began stroking his neck, while he talked in a very friendly manner. Soon he gave an unspellable chirp, and the horses started off briskly enough. The useful cowboy sprang on the steps and entered the car with the air of a man who is entitled to congratulations which he would like to avoid.

"Keep it," he said, as Ruth would return the coat; "I don't need it. I got powerful warm out there in the weather."

In the West there are small towns in which the appearance of a company of cowboys will produce consternation equaled only by that which a band of warlike Indians inspires, but their pistol-belts are not always a declaration of war, their odd nicknames no proof that they have lost their birthright. Because a man wears the regulation garb of a cowboy, and, following the law of nature which makes us all imitators, uses the American cowboy's favorite idioms, it does not follow that his heart is unkindly or his mind uncultured. The lives of many overworked professional men might be spared and



In the Blizzard.

strong health built up by a temporary lapse into such barbarism. It chiefly consists in breathing pure air twenty-four hours a day and in securing eight hours' sound sleep all night; against which things the American people seem to have conscientious scruples. So we have dyspepsia, consumption and insane asylums; we act as though we wanted them all. Omaha was too large a town and held the fort in too lively recollection to be disturbed by even a party of dead-shot cowboys. Perhaps one might pause to watch them as they rode through the streets, their picturesque dress helping one to remember that Omaha was really "Out West."

The cowboy dropped into a seat. On went the car. Mr. Anderson busied himself in trying to look through the frosty window-glass, but he could not do it; so he shouted to the driver,

"Stop at Twentieth and California streets."

The car came to a stop with a suddenness which nearly threw the people from their seats. Ruth thanked the cowboy for the use of his coat, and Mr. Anderson helped her from the car when a gust of wind almost swept her off her feet. Then did John Anderson develop the hero that was in him. Taking Ruth up bodily, he never stopped until he placed

her in a warm, lighted hallway and laughingly said,

“Excuse me, Miss Irving, but extreme cases require extreme treatment.—Mrs. Jewell, this bundle contains Miss Irving.”

A kind, motherly voice welcomed Ruth and her escort, while firm, warm, womanly hands undid the wrappings which Ruth's cold fingers could not manage.

CHAPTER VI.

RUTH'S NEXT CASE.

“There is no music in a rest, but there is the making of music in it.”

RUTH and her escort were thawed out by the register in a cheery parlor; a sweet motherly voice went on the while:

“Mr. Anderson, I knew you would bring Miss Irving; I never found you to fail in any undertaking.—We are all so glad to have you with us, Miss Irving. I am afraid that Miss Phelps is very sick, but, now that you are with us, I am much encouraged. I have done all that I could do, but I am unused to sickness, and my family is very large. Miss Phelps has a blessed brother who is as good as nurse and grandmother all in one, but—Why, what a child you are! I did not know that you were so young. I think it will be well for Miss Phelps to have with her some one who is near her own age.”

The last sentence was added as a disappointed look came over Ruth's face. How she did wish that she were not so young!

"Are there any more errands to be done?" asked Mr. Anderson. "Be sure to let me know if there are, for I told Phelps that I would see to things, so that he need not leave his sister."

"Yes, I will, Mr. Anderson," said Mrs. Jewell; "I will call on you as often as I can. It is such a comfort to have an errand-boy who can be relied on! But now I am going to send you away while we talk of Miss Phelps."

Mr. Anderson disappeared in the upper hallway, taking Ruth's satchel with him as he passed up the stairs.

"He is such a good-natured, thoughtful boy!" Mrs. Jewell remarked when the "boy" was no longer visible to the naked eye.

Ruth smiled at the thought of the boy, dark-bearded and "six feet two;" she knew that from force of habit Mrs. Jewell was, and always would be, pleased with everybody and with everything.

The young nurse heard the particulars of the case, which were best given beyond the patient's hearing, then she was shown up stairs and into the

sick-room. A fair, slight girl lay on a white bed ; her braided blond hair was thrown back over the pillow. From the restlessly-tossing head and the look of the white features, Ruth knew that there was much cause for anxiety. A grave-faced medical-man sat beside the bed with his fingers on the sufferer's pulse. His watch lay open on the bed ; he seemed oblivious to everything save the sick one. Opposite the doctor sat a young man who Ruth knew was the brother of whom Mrs. Jewell had spoken ; his face was manly, though his broad white brow, blue eyes and fair hair were much like those of his sister.

The sick girl moaned in her pain. After a time the doctor rose and beckoned Ruth from the room ; in the hall he gave her directions for the night's work, saying,

“She seems more quiet when her brother is near her. If she wants him, have him stay ; if not, let him get some rest. Miss Irving, I sent for you because I knew that I could trust you. You must not close your eyes to-night.”

The grave-faced medical-man took himself from the house. He was one who never spoke unless he had something to say ; he knew that not a soul

west of the Missouri River would dare question one of his statements or disobey his directions in a case of sickness.

Ruth took the doctor's place and began another of the long night-watches which had grown so familiar to her. An air of quiet, steadfast strength came over her; she seemed years older than the girl who had talked nonsense with Roy Ford not six hours before. She thought of her lover, and her face grew rosy as she wondered if he ever would take care of her as this man was caring for his sister.

The silence of the night-watch was broken only by the moans of the sick girl, a word or two of direction and the rustle as pillows were shaken. Morning came, but with it no change in the sick-room. Herbert Phelps scarcely left his sister's side. Over the boarding-house settled the great stillness which always comes when we would keep our darlings back from death. Bells were muffled, doors softly closed; every one thought of the darkened chamber and spoke and trod very softly. Ruth was surprised at the anxiety manifested by the boarders: it seemed more like a great family of brothers and sisters than a company of strangers

whom chance or Providence had thrown together under the roof of a Western boarding-house.

Two more days of anxious watching, two more nights of fear and trembling; as the third day closed the crisis came. They were all in the sick-room—the tired nurse, the motherly Mrs. Jewell, the anxious brother, while the solemn medical-man kept watch over all. The air became heavy with aromatic restoratives almost as soon as it entered the half-open window. Darkness came on. The members of the family tiptoed to the open door and looked into the room, then stole away thinking that they had bidden one more friend a silent farewell.

Herbert Phelps dropped on his knees beside his sister's bed; it was only for a moment, however, for he rose and began giving orders like a general ready for battle:

“Rub that hand, doctor.—Quick, Miss Irving! Give me the ammonia;” and he worked in a desperately calm fashion.

“My boy, it can do no good,” said the medical oracle; “you only disturb her. It will all be over soon.”

“You rub that arm all the same; she is living

yet. Here ! use this cologne ; she likes it," was the stern reply.

So they worked over the quiet body, more in pity for the stricken brother than in any hope of keeping the sick girl with them, but they worked as only they who are fighting death can work. In the next room a strong, big-hearted man knelt and asked God for the life that was then fluttering through the white lips.

Midnight came, and found the figure kneeling still, and the grave doctor said,

"She will live."

What kept this dear one back from death ? Was it the fervent prayer of a righteous man ? Was it the common-sense work of the faithful brother ? or was it God's way ?

There came long days of blissful rest from pain, of waiting for strength, and Eva Phelps slowly returned to health. The hush remained in the house ; rather, all sounds were musically subdued before they reached the sick-room, where lights came in freely. The watchful brother related funny little anecdotes at every call, and smiles were frequent on the features lately drawn by pain. The brother's breast-pocket seemed a storehouse for certain thick

letters wherein some one had "scrawled strange words with barbarous pen." The letters all bore the Denver stamp, and Herbert read them aloud while Ruth was gone down stairs to inquire if Mrs. Jewell thought that Miss Eva might drink beef-tea instead of milk. The letters did her more good than both milk and tea together.

Herbert and Eva Phelps had been orphaned early in life. Their father, when dying, had given them with the little money that he possessed to the care of John Anderson's father. Mr. Anderson was only a blacksmith in a quiet Vermont village, but he was faithful to those children. At the time of his father's death Herbert was a strong boy of fourteen. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson consulted him about the future; he said the money must all be saved for Eva's needs; he too would work and help provide for her. He was "hired out" to a farmer, and, contrary to the usual custom—in stories—he worked no harder than other boys, while the farmer and his wife were very kind to him. Many articles of boys' clothing found their way into his possession through the kindness of the farmer's wife. The boy was well paid, and his earnings were carefully saved. He talked proudly of the time when he

should be able to send Eva away to school. She, in the mean time, lived at her guardian's house, and slept, played and studied with Mary Anderson.

When the farmer went to the little village, he stopped in front of the blacksmith-shop, and the blacksmith came out with his hammer in his hand. He put his foot on the hub of one of the farmer's wagon-wheels ; he rested his elbow on his knee and his head on his hand while they talked about the children and their future. They said it was a pity to touch the money, there was so very little of it ; but Mr. Anderson was a poor man : he could scarcely afford this child's support, although love and care were gladly given her. When the farmer came again, he brought a bag of flour and a jug of milk ; and again a jar of butter was in his wagon, covered with big pie-plant leaves to keep it cool ; again it was a bag of apples, and in autumn a quarter of beef to be cured in thrifty New-England fashion. The farmer thought he did no more than his duty, but no doubt it is all credited to him in the big book up yonder.

Eva Phelps was her brother's idol. It was for her that he worked during the week ; and when he made her his Sunday visits, he thought her worthy

of his work and his love. Mrs. Anderson taught her wisely to work and save and study, as she did her own daughter Mary. The girls grew up, and "finished" the village school. They both taught for a time in country towns, after which they went away together to a normal school, from which they were graduated, when they declared gayly that they were ready for their mission. John and Herbert worked and studied. They took a course in a business college—a trifle late in life, perhaps, but all the better improved ; then they too were ready for what the future had for them. These four young people had many ambitions in life, but they were all away from the quiet little village which they said was chiefly "good to move from."

Kind Mr. Anderson died, and Mother Anderson—just like a mother—consented to pull up the roots of her life and try to plant them in Western soil because "the children's" dreams were all of the West. John, Herbert and Eva had gone in advance to get started ; in the spring Mother Anderson and Mary were to follow.

For years John Anderson had seen visions and dreamed dreams ; he told himself that as soon as he was started in business in the West he should

tell Eva all about them. But another young man had gone West; from far-off Denver he sent back thick letters, and Eva developed a wonderful interest in the workings of the United States mail-service.

Soon after our young people were settled in Omaha, Eva received a little box which contained Colorado gold wrought in shape fatal to all John Anderson's dreams. He told himself that she never should know; he tried to treat her as of old and not grow crabbed over his trouble. He told himself that when he saw Eva as Fred Fenn's wife he could give up his love for her; honor and pride would both come to his aid. No; John Anderson was not the sort of man to desire another man's wife. He thought he could overcome himself. He entrenched himself behind a breastwork of formality and called her "Miss Phelps," which hurt her not a little, for she regarded John as a brother. She never dreamed that the shining circle of Colorado gold caused the difference in his manner; she did not guess that it was only because of John's great-heartedness that peace was not at an end between them. And John? He had hid his love for years; he went on hiding

it, saying to himself over and over again, "She never shall know." It was like weaving a rope of sand.

When Eva was taken sick, John had learned that, as Eva Phelps or as Eva Fenn, she was to him for ever different from all other women. It would be easier to see the slim hands folded away for ever than to see them given to another. If Eva died, then she would always be his—his pure love of youth and manhood. He accused himself of feelings akin to murder, and struggled with a love stronger and purer than is often given to women. The night of the crisis he had conquered, and prayed that Eva might live—yes, live for Fred Fenn. No one called John Anderson a hero or dreamed of this victory of peace.

Kindly Mrs. Jewell was on the watch for opportunities to do something for the sick girl's comfort or to lighten the young nurse's care. It seemed to Ruth that Mrs. Jewell's strongest characteristic was motherliness. Ah! she had an ever-present memory of certain small graves on a Pennsylvania hillside; because of the memory, her heart was very tender toward all young people. Then the soul comes nearer the surface in the new country. Eva Phelps,

living in a Western boarding-house, her brother the only family tie the world held, was rich in care and tenderness. She may never realize the "music in the rest" which came unbidden into her life, but it brought out the sweet chord of much unselfish thoughtfulness.

Ruth became known to nearly all the boarders in those first days of suspense; every one felt free to speak to her, for there was always the question to be asked, "How is Miss Phelps now?" Perhaps she was not regularly introduced to them all; some forms and ceremonies had been omitted, and the universe was unmoved thereby. John Anderson seemed to feel responsible for her comfort in the house, and offered his services in the matter of errands. Ruth made him the bearer of certain notes, to which there came prompt replies. She liked this new friend very much, but the look of patient endurance and self-repression did not pass from his face as Eva's danger lessened. Ruth could find no good reason for his weary look.

As for John Anderson, he regarded this dark-eyed nurse as one of God's good angels, for was not she caring for Eva Phelps?

CHAPTER VII.

A WESTERN BOARDING-HOUSE.

“We may live without poetry, music or art,
We may live without conscience, we may live without heart,
We may live without friends, we may live without books;
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.”

THE martyrs of this world are numerous, and among those most frequently buffeted for their faults are boarding-house keepers. They have no rest from their labors; boarders think it pretty to growl, and newspaper-people echo their clamor. Even the little girl in the story said, “We don’t live: we board.”

Boarding-house hash is not calculated to inspire confidence; stale bread lives again in puddings that are deplorable; boarding-house biscuit proverbially abound in soda. On the very top of all this an Eastern preacher adds the weight of his testimony against an institution which we cannot do without. Doubtless there is much gossip and bad taste to be

endured, but these things must needs be when one's own household gods refuse to be set up. God has not yet set the solitary in families, and it would sometimes go hard with them if he had, for there are not cooks enough now to go around.

In the new country Mrs. Jewell had clad herself in widow's weeds and looked about her for some means of support. She said, "My talent is home-making: I will take boarders, and I will do it well." And she did. She gathered a company of young people about her and made a home for them. They were workers, young men and women who had purposes in life. By their own energy and merit they meant to gain honorable places in that young city. Satan never entered one of their hearts through a stomach made dyspeptic at Mrs. Jewell's table. So it was good will and good cheer, broad-souled living of vigorous lives, and in a boarding-house. Who shall gainsay it?

Eva Phelps slept soundly at dinner-time one day when Ruth had been a week in the house. Hannah, the Swedish damsel from below stairs, crept softly into the room and said in a high tenor whisper,

"Mrs. Jewell she say you vas to come to eat; I

vas to stay wiv the sheek lady. Oh my! she vas so sheek!"

Before this Ruth had caught her meals as it happened—sometimes before, sometimes after, the others; sometimes with one or two boarders, sometimes alone with Mrs. Jewell. She freshened her toilet and went down stairs. She found the boarders all seated at the dinner-table; they greeted her so cordially that she felt at home immediately.

A chair next to Mr. Phelps was vacant; he drew it back, saying,

"Miss Irving, come and take Eva's place."

"That is right, Mr. Phelps," said Mrs. Jewell as she brought in Ruth's soup; "you must be an apostle to Miss Irving. It is pleasant to have her down here with the rest of us."

Then John Anderson spoke up:

"I should like to inquire if the Anti-Pun Enterprise is yet in existence; if so, is it alive?"

"I judge that it is alive and healthy," said Charlie Hills: "I see the president is making a lively attack on that chicken."

"Hear! hear!" cried Mr. Phelps. "The A.-P. E. will please come to order. The treasurer will collect the usual fine of Mr. Hills."

Miss Fleming held out her hand, and Mr. Hills produced a nickel, which was passed from one to another, like the fare in a crowded street-car.

"One punster punished," was John Anderson's comment.

"Yes, won by one," laughed Miss Quick.

"Hold!" said Charlie Hills; "we are punning too quick."

"Have mercy on yourself, Charlie my boy," said Mr. Phelps. "There is too much hilarity here to-day."

After this brilliant remark, Miss Fleming collected four more nickels. She laid them beside her plate, and said gravely,

"Mr. President."

"Miss Fleming," said Mr. Phelps, with a low bow.

"Mr. President, we have a stranger with us. I move that Mr. Anderson be appointed a committee of one to explain the purpose and workings of the institution known as the A.-P. E."

"I second that motion," said Mr. Hills.

The motion was carried as by one voice.

Ruth was interested and curious. The eyes of all the A.-P. E. were upon John Anderson; his face

flushed hotly, for he was a man who could blush. He gave Miss Fleming a look which meant several things, and began :

“Miss Irving remembers an old copy-book which says, ‘Thou shalt not pun ;’ and again, ‘To pun is vulgar, and, verily, vulgarity is worse than wickedness.’ Now, certain members of this happy family were given over to the forbidden practice, and ‘there are few greater bores than an inveterate punster.’ The spirit of true philanthropy prompted certain others to labor to reclaim these erring brothers ; with this end in view, the A.-P. E. was organized. The most important article of our constitution provides that each member of the Enterprise shall be fined one nickel for every pun he perpetrates on a peaceful and long-suffering community. The treasurer is empowered to enforce this law without regard to ‘race, color or previous condition of servitude.’ The afore-mentioned nickels are to go toward Christmas festivities. Miss Fleming is our honored secretary and treasurer, and Mr. Phelps our gifted president. The constitution and by-laws are supposed to be properly framed and attached—by a brass chain—to the collar of our president’s office-dog.”

The explanation was accepted ; the president bore the office-dog part with a very good grace.

Talk went on, and fun, subdued with careful thought of the sick-room, but happy and thankful withal. John Anderson meditated on how he might punish Miss Fleming without hurting her.

Miss Fleming understood the mysteries of shorthand ; she also manipulated a type-writer in a lawyer's office down town. Perhaps that accounted for the alarming quickness of her wits and her skill in saying things. Yet she was sweet and unspoiled ; she quarreled vigorously with every one of the boarders, but would defend every one still more vigorously, and she was always good-natured. She delighted in tormenting John Anderson ; she knew that he could take care of himself, and that he never would grow impatient or say anything that would make her feel that she might have been a little rude. There were many friendly battles fought around and across this boarding-house table, but playing tricks on John Anderson was the safest, most interesting amusement.

“Through two long weeks I shall sigh in vain for these good things,” said John Anderson as Mrs. Jewell brought in the dessert.

“Why so? Are you going away?” Mrs. Jewell questioned.

“Are you going away?” came in a chorus from the boarders.

“Only for a little while,” he replied; “fate—or the company as the representative of fate—sends me out for a short trip. I shall be at home before Christmas.”

“Yes,” said Charlie Hills, “you go away and pun to your heart’s content, and then come back to our Christmas doings as though you had stayed at home and paid fines like a Christian.”

“No, Johnny; that will never do,” said Mr. Phelps.

With much laughter and nonsense it was decided that Mr. Anderson should write a long letter once in four days; said letters were to be long enough to make amends for taking himself beyond the reach of fines. The letters were to be addressed to Mrs. Jewell, as she was an honorary member of the A.-P. E.

Mr. Anderson excused the boarders from answering his letters with a cheerfulness which surprised them:

“Yes, I will send you a full account of my ex-

periences, but I do not wish to hear any remarks on my use of the first person singular."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Hills, "use the capital 'I' as much as you wish. We are all pining to know more about you."

Dinner was over; the members of the Anti-Pun Enterprise went their several ways. Ruth returned to her charge; she felt that the earth was bigger and broader than ever before. It seemed to her as though she had known these people for a thousand years.

That afternoon the Swedish damsel announced that some one wished to see Miss Irving in the parlor. The "some one" proved to be John Anderson. In his hand he carried several stamped envelopes already addressed to himself at different towns in the State. Would Miss Irving write notes telling of Miss Phelps's welfare and slip them into the envelopes and put them in the letter-box? The envelopes were all carefully numbered, that she might know in what order to use them. Would she write every day, and not say one word about it to the others? She could save him so much anxiety. Would she give those roses to Miss Eva, with his very best wishes?

Yes, Ruth would do all this, and be very much interested in doing it. She knew nothing of the thick letters in the brother's pocket; she knew nothing of the old days in Vermont or of the hopes crushed by the broad band of Colorado gold; but she remembered the look in John Anderson's eyes as he asked her to go with him through the storm for Eva's sake. She hid the envelopes and told Eva that Mr. Anderson had gone away, but had left her his very best wishes and a cluster of lovely roses.

"I hope he will have a pleasant trip. I shall be almost well when he returns," said Eva; but her thoughts were not for John Anderson. There was a thick letter under her pillow, and she asked Ruth to answer it for her. She tried to dictate the letter, but it is hard for any one to dictate that kind of a letter.

Ruth, being possessed of much common sense—which is an excellent thing in a woman—wrote the letter out of her own head and allowed her patient to write just five short words at the end. She slipped the letter into the green United States mailbox fastened to a lamp-post on the corner; she thought of the other letters she was to place there,

and sighed. Things were not to her mind. She liked both John Anderson and Eva Phelps, but she had no use for that man in Denver. Some way, he would not fit into any of her plans.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAVELING-MAN.

“Men must be busy out of doors—must stir
The city. Yea, make the great world aware
That they are in it.”

A PUFFING engine, a long line of freight-cars with one baggage- and one passenger-car attached, followed the serpentine track which wound itself around and among the mounds or hillocks of the rolling prairie. This was a branch road. In the morning a train took people and produce to the main line; at night another long train took settlers and speculators to the front.

The train was known as the way freight and accommodation train; freight was plentiful, but there was very little accommodation about the train, the passengers thought. As to its occupants, the passenger-coach might have been taken for a representative car. There were settlers even in December. There was an old farmer from “Down East” going “Out

West" to see his married daughter; he was garrulous with wonder over the general bigness of things. There were a cattle-man, a corn-man and an ordinary business-man. The woman with the baby was there, also the pretty girl traveling alone. There was a tyro in the home-missionary business—an honest, blundering sort of a man, slow-spoken and long-sermoned; he might have tried to be as "harmless as a dove," but he was not as wise as a serpent. He had been a failure in the East; now he would try to evangelize the West. That is about the most hopeless task that a man of his stamp can undertake; however, on the morrow he was to preach his first sermon to Western people. He felt nervous, and thought over his sermon as the light began to fade. He should have studied the human nature that the car contained, but this man never had studied human nature; he knew that the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. No, he did not care to know human nature as it is; he theorized about what it *ought* to be. As a natural consequence, he lacked sympathy, force and personal magnetism. His favorite mode of correcting an evil was "frowning down upon it from the pulpit." He frowned down upon the peo-

ple in that car, for the traveling-man was there—several of his class, in fact. They bestowed themselves and their sample-cases with as much regard for comfort as possible, and kept things lively most of the time. One traveling-man entertained the old farmer, one read *The Commercial Traveler*, some played cards, and they all shocked the new missionary. I shall not call him “the wicked traveling-man” nor tell you of his sins, neither will I make affidavit that he is perfect; but then the President and his Cabinet are not without reproach. When the manliness of the world is sized up, as much whole-souled manhood will be found among traveling-men as in the same number of pounds avoirdupois men of other callings. The traveling-man faces as many temptations in twenty-four hours as the old-time New England village deacon met in five years. The traveling-man plays cards; so do other people. He will flirt with the pretty girl in the next seat, but he will kiss the picture of his wife and baby before he sleeps. He “trades lies” with other traveling-men, and then turns to help an old lady down the car steps. He takes a fifteen-cent lunch, charges his firm with a seventy-five cent dinner, and gives the other sixty cents to a cripple.

Night shut down ; it grew too dark to play cards, and not quite dark enough to compel the brakeman to light the lamps. The train stopped at a station, and there was a slight change in the population of the car. One of the new-comers slapped a traveling-man on his shoulder and said heartily,

“I say, Anderson ! wake up ! Who expected to see you here ? How is Omaha ?”

Anderson shook the new-comer's hand, made room in the seat for him and helped stow away his luggage, saying all the while,

“Hello ! how do you do ? Omaha is all right. Where have you been ? How is everything on the road ?”

“Where have I been ? I have been to Greenland. I mean the northern part of this State. Had the worst blizzard up there that I ever have had the luck to strike.”

“How cold was it ?” asked the old farmer, who was taking notes.

“It was so cold that the thermometers all froze up,” said the traveler, regardless of a Hereafter. “Why, when a man talked, his words would stay frozen in the air for hours. You could read the air like print, only you had to begin at the other end of

the line.—Say, boys, what is the matter? What makes this train run so slowly?”

“My dear friend,” said one of the group who had been playing cards, “let me correct you. There was a slight error in the wording of your question. This train does not run: it never learned how. It still creeps.”

“I accept the amendment,” said the other, good-naturedly. “But what is the matter?”

“I allow it is because the road is so crooked that the engineer is afraid he will run off the track if he goes too fast,” suggested a drummer from Milwaukee.

“They tell me that a brakeman walks ahead with a lantern of a dark night,” said Mr. Anderson.

“Well, I never!” was all the old farmer could say.

The home missionary was breathless with amazement over such wholesale prevarication. What awful liars those men were! or if by chance it was truth they were telling, he must be moving into a strange kind of country. Any way, he did not approve of such talk; he would frown down upon it from the pulpit the very next day. His medita-

tions were cut short by the brakeman, who yelled the name of a station in some unknown tongue. The missionary, a traveler for a Troy stove-house, a Chicago grocer, an Omaha drygoods-man, a St. Louis cigar-man, a St. Joseph tea-traveler and John Anderson left the car to try the realities of life in a Western hotel. The train was drawn up by a low Western station; an open wagon with lengthwise seats stood by the long platform, and the hotel-emissary shouted blithely:

“Right this way for the Commercial Hotel. Best hotel in the city! Just been refitted! Terms reasonable!”

The new arrivals all went to the Commercial Hotel.

“Western hotels are not the worst places in the world in which to spend a Sunday.” So John Anderson reflected as he sat at the breakfast-table next morning. He stirred his coffee and gazed, or tried to gaze, into its murky depths. The other traveling-men were at the table; so was the home missionary, who had already begun the process of “frowning down” upon the traveling-men. Observing which, they immediately put themselves on

the defensive and told their biggest stories with a view to shocking him still more.

John Anderson's soul was troubled; he was a man who kept one day in seven as sacred to the Lord, and he saw very little prospect of anything of the kind being done about him. He was not a patient man by nature; he had thoroughly pommelled his enemies in his school-days—had doubtless gotten himself into many unnecessary fights. Sometimes his eyes still showed that a great deal of temper was being held in check, but the temper seldom mastered him. He had grown as awkward and almost as tall as our honored Lincoln, while Eva Phelps was a mere slip of a child. The contrast between his unwieldy self and her fairy little body was a constant incentive to gentleness on his part. At last he thought that because of his great strength he must be very gentle with his fellows. There had been long years in which he had tried to train and refine himself into a type of manhood which he considered worthy of Eva Phelps; now the strength of his love for her had been tested and he knew that he had given her up, yet for her sake, if not for his own and because he did love her, he kept his standard of manhood very

high. At least, he would remain worthy of her. Unconsciously she had been the guide of his life, but for the first time in all his years he dreaded to meet her. How could he bear to see her weak and helpless and know that his great strength could do for her only what any ordinary friend might do? This was not weakness. John Anderson was not sentimental above his kind; he was glad when the firm sent him off to pick up some of the loose ends of their business. Yes, he would go away and think it all over. When he got away, thinking it over was the very last thing which he wanted to do. He looked around on the conflicting elements as he sat in the hotel, and made up his mind to bring about something like a proper observance of the day, in spite of the traveling-man or the preacher. Moreover, he decided that each one of the travelers should think that "keeping Sunday" had been his own idea.

Before the meal was eaten the travelers' spirits had bubbled over in decided irreverence. The minister left the room horrified at so much ungodliness. He did not try in any way to conciliate his companions; frowning down upon them was a part of his creed.

"I allow they spoiled a pretty good hod-carrier when they made a preacher out of him," said the man from St. Joseph as the missionary left the room.

"I don't go much on these preachers," said the man from Chicago.

"I say, boys! let's stand by a man that is just beginning," suggested John Anderson.

"That's so! I reckon I should have gone to hear him preach if he had treated us halfway white," said the man from St. Louis.

"We might go around and hear what he has to say, just the same," said Mr. Anderson. He knew that his scheme, if it were to be successful, must be worked up very quietly.

"I don't know as there is anything better to do in this town," said the man from Chicago. "I do go to church when I am in Omaha. I have forgotten why I went the first time, but the preacher prayed for strangers, and he put in such a good word for us fellows that I try on that church every chance I can get."

"This old duffer is not that style of a man," observed the man from Troy.

After much more talk of this sort the men agreed

upon a verdict which in the cold and uncultured language of the West was this :

“ We will go around and help give him a good send-off.”

The six commercial-men made careful toilets and walked to the mission church. The spirit of mischief was all gone. They would join in the hymns and be reverent in prayer-time ; they would listen to the sermon with respectful attention ; the collection-plate should not pass them by unnoticed. Do not imagine that they listened to a pipe-organ or trod three-ply carpets or rested their eyes on soft frescoes. The church-building stood on posts, as did most Western buildings of that date. The church-members were growing up with the country ; they could not afford to put a brick foundation under their house of worship. They sat upon uncushioned seats, they gazed at roughly-plastered walls, they did their own singing.

The new preacher, embarrassed and fearful from the first, was ten times more fearful when he saw his tormentors of the morning. He remembered the awful lies they had told, and the remembrance nearly overcame him ; but he rallied and preached an exhaustive sermon on future punishment, firing

it all at the traveling-men. The Presbytery may decide that they needed it, but you can win more hearts by the story of the place called "Calvary" than by any picture of the punishments of hell, real as they are. The warm, outstretched hand is grasped sooner than the clenched fist. The new missionary lost one more chance to reach these men. They walked very quietly back to the hotel, and some of them played a game which the new missionary did not understand. On the whole, this did not seem much like a Christian Sunday. The landlord had some ideas on the subject, and prohibited card-playing in the public office. The drummers went to the St. Louis man's room, and proceeded with their game.

John Anderson had ideas of his own on the whole subject. The door of the family sitting-room had stood open as he went to breakfast; that open door revealed a way out of many of the difficulties. The way led to a very pretty cabinet organ, and he set out upon it at once. He listened to the landlord's political and religious views; then he skillfully turned the subject to advertising and advertising cards. He said he had some nice cards in his gripsack; he thought the little girl would like them. Before dinner was over he gained the entire confidence of

the twelve-year-old daughter of the house ; he also discovered that she had no older sister. The little woman invited him into the sitting-room, and he asked her to play for him. No ; she could not play. Papa bought the organ only last week ; soon she was to take lessons. Could *he* play ? Would he try her new organ ?

“ Yes, I play a little sometimes,” said Mr. Anderson as meekly as though he had not worked two hours for that invitation.

The reverend gentleman was invisible ; the traveling-men up stairs played poker. The little woman opened the hall door—for the sitting-room was warm—and John Anderson played “ Home, Sweet Home.” He was not a scientific organist, but he possessed a good voice and an “ ear for music.” He had attended singing-schools from his childhood up, and had tormented his sister while she practiced her music-lessons ; therefore he played his own accompaniment fairly well. He was not skillful enough to make very common people afraid of him. He used the new organ to the best possible advantage, and sang :

“ Some day I’ll wander back again
To where the old home stands.”

The small-boy of the house—always ready for something new—came before the first verse was finished; the second brought the proprietor, his wife and the baby, also some of the regular boarders. They all begged for another song, and John sang that tender home-song written by Cyrus M. Barber :

LEAVING MY HILLSIDE HOME.

I sat beside a flowing spring
Where I had often sat before;
I heard the feathered songsters sing
Songs I could hope to hear no more,
For I must leave that cherished spot,
That cooling spring and shady grove:
Its joys could never be forgot
Though in a distant land I rove.

CHORUS.

My hillside home! oh, cherished spot
Where memory lingers oft and long!
Thy joys will never be forgot;
Of thee I'll sing my sweetest song.

I left that spring, but other springs
I've found, with water just as clear,
But, ah! one thought my memory stings:
I cannot find a home so dear,
For there the friends of childhood dwell,
Those dear by nature's purest ties:

Though other friends their love may tell,
Yet when they're gone their friendship dies.

I left that home: a mother's tear
Stood on her cheek and spoke her love;
The hopeful face of sister dear
Expressed a love no word could prove;
And father, as we knelt in prayer
Around the hearth so strangely still,
Asked God that his almighty care
Might keep their boy from every ill.

So the influence of that pure home on the hill-side reached out and surrounded those sojourners in a Western hotel. The singer, well pleased with his success in rivaling the game of poker, sung on. The next song was,

“Mother, is the old home lonely—
Lonely to you night and day?”

When it was finished, the drummer from St. Joseph cried,

“I say, Anderson! for mercy's sake quit singing that kind of song! I reckon they are mighty nice for a man who has a home, but they are rough on a fellow who has none.”

The traveling-man made vigorous use of his handkerchief, while the preacher, up stairs, went

on overhauling a sermon on total depravity with a view to meeting the wants of these men.

They hunted up all the sheet-music the house contained; the little woman borrowed three copies of *Gospel Hymns*; the man from Chicago owned that he had some sheet-music in his gripsack, and was required to produce the same. A local genius agreed to play accompaniments; so the Chicago drummer and John Anderson made a figure eleven of themselves while they sung "Larboard Watch." Then John Anderson willed that the St. Louis man and the Chicago man sing "What are the Wild Waves Saying?" after which, the Chicago drummer sang Longfellow's "Rainy Day."

The traveling-man from Troy suggested that they sing some "Sunday tunes." The scheming John, wise in human memories and human nature, knew that some one would make that suggestion, and that whoever made it would take credit to himself for having made a praiseworthy remark; so the *Gospel Hymns* were in demand, and they swelled a grand chorus. Time would fail me to name all their songs.

At last the Chicago drummer's rich baritone rang out grandly in "Not Ashamed of Christ."

The missionary, up stairs, listened in amazement, then went on with the preparation of his sermon ; but he lost one more chance of reaching these men, and many of the town's people besides, for passers by, hearing the music, filled the little hallway and the office beyond. Everybody wondered why the new preacher was not with the singers.

All honor to the home missionaries ! They are the bravest soldiers of our time. We need more of them this very hour. From the heights of the future all coming generations will look down on their victories of peace. The West needs brave men—men with great, broad souls, men who understand human nature and are sympathetic and full of true love for their fellow-men. We want men who see in every man a brother—a soul to be lost or a soul to be won ; men who believe that every heart has one sweet chord even in the midst of half a dozen conflicting beliefs or of total unbelief ; men who are instant in season and out of season, for the circumstances of Western life frequently throw people into close companionship one day and the next they part for ever.

The future of the country depends greatly on our home missionaries. The story of the Nazarene

must be told to thousands of heathen within our own borders; honest doubt must be met with Christian evidences: the vulgar scoffing which makes fun of the Bible will defeat itself. We want men of sanctified common sense and with warm, cheery ways; men who in their own lives and very faces represent and image forth the sweetness and the gracious love of God. In proportion as such soldiers of the cross go to the front, we may dismiss our standing army, for we shall be gaining victories of peace.

Cultured East, keep your smartest lawyers if you will—keep your tonguiest agents; but when you send us ministers, send us your best, your truest and most Christlike men.

CHAPTER IX.

THIS WESTERN COUNTRY.

“It isn’t the funniest thing a man can do—
Existing in a country when it’s new.”

THE Anti-Pun Enterprise was seated about the dinner-table. After the dessert had been finished, President Phelps called the meeting to order and read John Anderson’s first letter :

“COMMERCIAL HOTEL, NINEVEH, NEB.,

“Dec. 13, 18—.

“THE ANTI-PUN ENTERPRISE, OMAHA, NEB. :

“MY DEAR FRIENDS : I have attended to business, eaten my supper, and now I am ready to devote the remainder of the evening to letter-writing.

“Ah, this lovely stillness ! The only sounds I hear which come from anything human arise from the bar-room, below. I hear something like this :

“ ‘ What’s trump ? ’

“‘Oh, I got high, low, Jack and the game.’

“Emerson says something like this: ‘All men in the abstract are just and good; what hinders them in the particular is the momentary predominance of the finite and individual.’ The people below seem to have a severe attack of the ‘finite and individual,’ also of tobacco; for that bar-room smells up to my room. I came near forgetting to state that a baby’s clarion voice looms up above the other sounds in good style.

“This is a fine town in which to see real life as it exists on the eastern border of the Great American Desert. As yet I have discovered no church in this place of nearly a thousand inhabitants. Steamboats come up here, and the river-man and the railroad-man and the traveling-man keep things lively most of the time. Just at present burglarizing seems to be the order of the day—or, rather, of the night. If I am not stolen from my downy couch before morning, I shall have cause for thanksgiving.

“I had some experience last night. You noticed that the weather was quite cold. I thought it might be a proper scheme to have a room that was well warmed, so I ordered one with a stove in it.

Mine host said, 'All right!' and I supposed that I had a warm nest waiting for me. About ten o'clock I went up stairs I found it all wrong. It was true that I had a room with a stove in it, but there was no fire in the stove. The coldness was so dense that it seemed almost as if you could cut it with a knife. I sought the proprietor and referred to my petition for a fire.

"'You have a room with a stove in it,' he said, blandly, 'but I have no coal for extra fires. Moreover, there is none in town.'

"Such is the gratitude of man! for be it known that I had just helped him out of a great trouble. While I was sitting in the office trading lies with another traveling-man the proprietor came into the room and said to me,

"'Will you not go into the parlor and play on the organ a little while?'

"I asked him why, and he said,

"'There is a young man in there who wants to sit up with one of my girls, and I don't want him to. I thought if you would play, and so help occupy the room, maybe he would go away.'

"I charged him with hinting that my playing was not first class, but he said that he did not mean

anything; so I let him off. I told him to take a blanket and a pillow into the parlor, and say that he thought he should have to put a man in there on the couch. Mine host smiled very sweetly, and went away. Soon he returned; he said the scheme worked like a charm, and promptly set up the cigars. The next thing he did was to send me to a cold room, but his conscience smote him, and I had a bed on that parlor couch, after all. (To be continued.)

“Yours truly,

“JOHN ANDERSON.

“P. S. I hope Miss Eva is still gaining strength?

“J. A.”

Ruth carried the letter up stairs and read it to Eva Phelps.

“I wonder that traveling-men do not all die from the changes and exposure they are obliged to endure,” said Eva. “I hope John took no hurt from his ‘experience,’ as he terms it.” With this benevolent wish she dismissed John Anderson from her mind; she thought no more of him for hours.

There was another thick letter to be answered; after which, Ruth made out one of the promised

bulletins and slipped it into one of the carefully-hidden envelopes.

A friendship was growing up between Ruth Irving and Eva Phelps; their close companionship and the difference in their natures made this result almost certain. Eva gained strength rapidly; there was talk of an easy-chair and a wrapper for her in the near future. Ruth's gay laugh and bright nonsense were heard in the sick-room, and in part accounted for the rapid improvement in the patient; her quiet nature needed the spur of Ruth's business-like ways. Dainty Eva unconsciously gave Ruth many of the refining touches which never before had come into her busy life. The grave-faced doctor came less and less frequently, and when he did come took no credit to himself that Eva's life was spared. He regarded Herbert Phelps as a model brother; for the rest he took refuge behind the rampart of professional reticence.

Kindly Mrs. Jewell was the power behind Ruth's fate that afternoon; the good woman declared that they had kept the young nurse housed too closely, and willed that Ruth go out in pursuit of oxygen. The motherly woman made much pretence of haste as she helped Ruth put on her cloak, declaring

gayly that the patient should be ten degrees better by the time night came and the nurse came back to the boarding-house. Two white letters were snuggled close in Ruth's pocket; they told each other no secrets, for they were on their way to men separated as by a great gulf in that they both loved the same woman.

There is no brush nor pen which can do justice to the glory of a clear winter day on the plains. No canvas can catch the coloring, no book imprison the inspiration. Ruth, with her hopes and ambitions, was just in sympathy with the rushing life seen in the streets of that young city. "Business was booming." Everybody acted as though he were going somewhere and had an object in going to that particular place.

Ruth hurriedly turned a corner to avoid meeting a drove of broncho ponies which were being driven into the city to be sold into captivity. The ponies walked along with their heads down, never showing a sign of the curiosity with which country-dwellers usually enter a city. Neither did they manifest that spirit of total depravity which is popularly attributed to broncho ponies. The ponies, with their herders clad in heavy shirts, buckskin breeches,

long boots, Mexican sombreros, and with long lassoes wound around the saddle-pommel, helped to give the scene a touch of the picturesque only attained by Eastern cities on circus-day.

Ruth found Dr. Ross at home and ready to devote a few minutes to chatting. Soon Mr. Ford called. He said that he had seen Miss Irving on the street; he had come around to inquire after the sick. The three spent an hour of merry nonsense interspersed with occasional gleams of sense; then Ruth must go back to her charge. Mr. Ford walked home with her.

Busy Sixteenth street is a good place for talking; no one will listen to your confidences. It was a cold December twilight when Ruth rang the bell at Mrs. Jewell's, but she would have told you that it was "right warm out." She felt that in the strength of that walk and talk she could work many days.

The next day was one to be marked with a red letter: Eva Phelps took a few trembling steps and sat for an hour in the great easy-chair. The Anti-Pun Enterprise made wretched puns, as in the good old days before the Society for the Prevention of Puns. Nickels accumulated rapidly, and Miss

Fleming professed much anxiety as to window-fasteners. The people at the boarding-house made many plans for the coming Christmas and the disposition of the shining nickels. They talked of Christmas decoration and commented on evergreen, ground-pine, holly and mistletoe as freely as though they lived in New England. Everybody promised to reform after the holidays; no puns should be tolerated then. Secrets were plentiful and hard to keep.

The short days passed swiftly, and in due time John Anderson's second letter came before the Anti-Pun Enterprise:

“COMMERCIAL HOTEL, OAKDALE, NEB.,

“Dec. 17, 18—.

“THE ANTI-PUN ENTERPRISE—

“MY DEAR FRIENDS: Now that I have found myself again, I will write another of the promised letters. You must know that I lost myself on the Santee Sioux Indian reservation. This reservation occupies the central part of Knox County and lies about midway between the border-towns of Niobrara and Herrick. I am not sure as to the size of the reserve, but I think it is about twenty miles square.

In their palmy days the Sioux Indians were lords of all this part of the country, but Indians are only human, after all, and the Sioux did not agree among themselves. The tribe was divided, and the red men now known as the Santee Sioux took the lowlands, while the rest retreated to the mountains.

“It was my business to visit the towns of Niobrara and Herrick. Last Tuesday morning a man named John Hanson and myself left the town of Creighton, which is the railroad-town nearest the places we wished to visit. We reached Niobrara about two o’clock ; there we had dinner and fed the ponies. About three o’clock we set out for the dismal town of Herrick. We struck the Indian agency a little after dark. We tried to get a place to stay all night, or even something to eat, but failed to do so, by reason of orders to the contrary from headquarters. Charges against various persons were being investigated, and our red brothers were much excited. The agency doctor told us that it would be unpleasant for a strange white man to be found there longer than was strictly necessary. You may call this a cool reception, but, all things considered, we did not care for a warmer one. We had several

arguments with Lo, as it was; which arguments were caused by the fact that we could not see the wigwams in the dark, and so ran against them.

“We found the open country, and then our troubles really began. Remember, we were armed with only a pair of bronchos, an open wagon and a dark-lantern. We had not gone far before we came to a place where two ways met. We took the left-hand road, and soon found ourselves on a bluff in front of a little cabin. Hanson took the glim and started on a prospecting-tour. He went down into the draw to see where the road led to, and found himself among lots of wigwams and more Indian curs. As fast as he could turn the light in one dog’s eyes another would attack him from the rear. I was on the bluffs, holding the horses and being interviewed by Sioux who wore United States blue, but could not use United States talk. I don’t profess to be much on Sioux dialect, and ‘their sun-baked faces didn’t teem with conversational graces,’ as Will Carleton puts it.

“Hanson came up the hill with the lantern turned so that the light was shed straight ahead as from a locomotive headlight. The Indians thought that we meant to run off with their ponies. We found one

red man who could talk a little of the white man's language. He wanted to know 'Where go?' and 'What do?' We told him 'Herrick,' and he pointed around in various directions and showed us the way out. We followed an invisible trail. Even the beauties of nature refused to cheer our way. The night was black.

"After about three hours we sighted an Indian camp-fire. Fifteen or twenty Indians were crouching around a dying council-fire. One of the men understood our language. He told us that a white man lived farther on, and after we had crossed his palm with silver he agreed to show the way to the white man's house. We procured a midnight supper and cared for our poor horses. At ten o'clock the next day we found the city of Herrick, which at this writing consists of three log houses. One of the houses has a room used as a store and post-office.

"You will wonder why the firm sent me into this region; so do I. So far as I can see, it has been a 'fool's errand.'

"You will ask me what I think of the Indians now. I answer, I think just as I have always thought. When I think of the wrongs the red

man, the black man and the little yellow man have endured at the hands of this government, I wonder that the American people are not swept from the earth by fire and brimstone.

“You will say, ‘Clear the track, for Anderson has mounted his hobby,’ and I intend to stay mounted; but I will not run over any of you, so I will close, hoping that you are all well and happy.

“Sincerely your friend,

“JOHN ANDERSON.”

CHAPTER X.

"LANDING ON SOME SILENT SHORE."

"For none return from those spirit-shores
Who cross with the boatman cold and pale;
* * * * *
Yet somewhere, I know, on the unseen shore
They watch and wait and beckon for me."

EVA PHELPS gained steadily in strength, and since the day of those first feeble steppings was able to sit up much of the time. Her brother was tortured by the fear that she might try her strength too far, and so bring on a relapse. He gave much advice of this sort:

"Little sister, don't hurry yourself. You may always be healthy after this; so this will prove your one chance to enjoy leisure and luxury, besides having your own sweet will."

"I sigh for a larger sphere," said Eva, with a laugh.

The house was fast losing the constraint of sick-

ness; the spirit of Christmas pervaded every corner. The Anti-Pun Enterprise made wretched puns, and fined themselves, in consequence, that the Christmas fund might be large. They made themselves merry over John Anderson's letters and wished them longer, but Mrs. Jewell, with a spirit of gloomy foreboding not a native of her soul, spent anxious hours. In her secret heart she knew that John Anderson would bring a terrible cold home with him. The idea so possessed her that she set about renewing her stock of medicines for that most unpoetical thing, a "bad cold."

The boarders were all at supper; after the manner of boarders, they discussed matters and things, also people.

"This is the twentieth," said Mr. Phelps; "we will have another letter, or else we will have John, by to-morrow."

"I wonder why they sent him to that region?" said Miss Fleming.

"It must have been to see the country and guess what the business outlook will be after the wilds are settled," said Charlie Hills as he made his first attack upon Mrs. Jewell's toothsome gems.

"I am surprised that he retains his romantic admiration for the Indians, after his experience on that reservation," said Miss Quick.

"I don't call it a 'romantic' admiration," said Mr. Hills; "with him it is a deep-seated principle. It is his nature. Anderson has a big soul, and the idea that God 'hath made of one blood all the nations of men' has taken possession of him. That is not a popular doctrine—never has been, even in Christian nations."

"You are right," said Mr. Phelps; "it is John's nature. He always sides with the weakest dog in the fight. He does like to see fair play, and he knows the 'black man, the red man and the little yellow man' never have had it. He will champion the cause of the oppressed to his dying hour, and I honor him for it."

"I wonder how the Indians and the Chinese will get on with what few Congressmen they chance to find in heaven?" said Miss Fleming as she calmly sipped her tea.

"That depends on how long our Congressmen keep on grinding out legal irony on the cornerstone, Plymouth-Rock-foundation boulder of the Declaration of Independence," replied Mr. Phelps.

Then Mr. Hills quoted in solemn monotone :

“‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men were created equal ; that they were endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights ; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness ; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their power from the consent of the governed.’”

“That is a very pungent quotation,” said Mr. Phelps. “John is a man who—”

“Has an awful cold,” put in a new voice ; and John Anderson stood before them. “I am glad that you missed me,” he continued as he went around the table shaking hands with every one. “I know you were lonely without me, or I should not find you using my name so freely. Yes, I have come back from wandering to and fro upon the reservation to rest in the bosom of the family.”

“Just make a little noise when you come in, and you will not find us talking about you, Johnny. Those non-squeaking shoes of yours should be prohibited by law,” said Mr. Hills, who was noted for the amount of noise which he made in the house.

There was much exclaiming, there was much

hearty laughter—the healthy, happy laughter of people who had a right to laugh because of the honest, faithful work they did in the world.

Mr. Anderson was made chairman of the committee on “Christmas doings.” Ruth went back to her room wondering if that gay young man was the one she had almost pitied because of his hopeless love. She wished she had not been so faithful in the matter of the notes; she did not believe that John Anderson cared very much, after all. She knew that even his talk of a cold worried none of the boarders. But Mrs. Jewell made hot lemonade and did other kind, motherly deeds for his comfort. John Anderson made fun of the dosing, while he blessed Mrs. Jewell in his heart. That night she very much reminded him of his own mother.

Some time after midnight Ruth awakened suddenly. She heard low voices, and then some one stole down stairs: soon she thought she heard Mrs. Jewell’s voice in the hall. She slipped from her couch and crept silently out of the room, bent on knowing what the trouble was all about. She thought she could sleep again if she only knew, but the curiosity was maddening. There was no more

sleep for Ruth Irving that night. The cold was recognized now: John Anderson was sick.

Mr. Phelps had summoned Mrs. Jewell; five minutes later Ruth interviewed them both in the lower hall.

"Mr. Phelps," she said, "you must go for the doctor, and please go quickly. Tell him it is a case of pneumonia, and a very severe one."

So Ruth was installed in another sick-room, and Jessie Fleming was wakened that she might take Ruth's place on the couch in Eva's room.

"He is doing well," said the doctor next day; so all hoped for the best and began to wonder if they had better write to his friends.

"No," said Herbert Phelps; "he has only his mother and one sister at home. We will not worry them needlessly. John is strong, and will pull through. Mother Anderson always says 'no news is good news.'"

It was near the end of the third day. Ruth sat by her patient, thinking he slept. She understood him better then; she had caught broken, half-delirious sentences from which she knew that John Anderson meant to rejoice with those who rejoice and never ask any one to share his burdens.

She thought sadly of the weak giant on the bed ; she thought tenderly of her own lover, and was thankful that her love had fallen in pleasant places. A low voice called her back from her day-dreams :

“Miss Irving, will you open my gripsack and take out the package done up in white paper?”

Ruth did as he requested, and then waited. The sick man studied her face thoughtfully, and then went on :

“I have not thanked you for the letters which you sent me ; I thank you now. I brought you that bit of Indian bead-work in memory of them.”

“Oh, I thank you so much !” said Ruth, gently. “I shall prize this very highly. But I must not let you talk any more now.”

“Yes, you must—and you shall. I have much to say, and little time in which to say it. I have known all day that a great change is coming soon. I have put this off as long as I can. Don’t interrupt me. You have guessed how I feel toward Miss Phelps. It is no use ; I knew it all the while. Yet I am glad she lived ; I am thankful for the love I have for Eva Phelps. It has made a better man of me. I want to see her before I die, but I am glad she does not love me as I love

her. Now she will only mourn for me as a pleasant friend. Remember what I say. Now this is for mother and the dear sister at home."

Tears streamed from Ruth's eyes as she listened to the low-spoken words. The last messages were given while the death-huskiness sounded in John Anderson's throat; then his life-work was done. He had only to see the girl he loved so unselfishly, and then—die.

Mrs. Jewell sent swift messengers for the doctor and for Herbert Phelps. The doctor came, but only to confirm the worst fear. The whole household soon knew that John Anderson was dying. Ruth brought Eva to see him, and the two girls stood beside his bed with arms around each other, for Ruth dared not leave her patients even in the sacred hour of parting.

Eva Phelps loved John Anderson almost as she loved her brother. She forgot the gleam of Colorado gold on the hand which smoothed the thick black hair away from his temples; she forgot that she had thought him cold of late; she forgot everything save that one true friend who was passing into the unknown. Her heart cried, "I cannot spare him!" She did not guess how peace-

ful was his soul; she did not guess that he was half glad to lay down the life which she had made a burden to him. She heard his dying blessing; she covered his forehead and lips with fond kisses; then Ruth led her from the room.

Herbert Phelps rushed up stairs in answer to the brief summons. He caught his sister in his arms, carried her to her own room and placed her on the bed. She lay with wide-staring eyes and with face like marble. The doctor mercifully prepared a sleeping-mixture and held it to her lips; she drank it without a question as to its nature. Soon they had the satisfaction of seeing her go quietly to sleep. They were glad that her sorrow had been beaten off some hours.

Ruth went back to the dying man. By his side stood a minister of God holding the nerveless hand in his own and speaking words of comfort. The white lips moved. The minister stooped to catch the whispers; then he said,

“John asks for his nurse. I think he wants to see her.”

The sorrowful group made room for Ruth at the bedside.

John Anderson slowly whispered,

"This—is—my nurse—Miss Irving."

"He wants to introduce us;" and the minister gave Ruth one hand, while with the other he still held the one so swiftly growing pulseless. "Miss Irving, we must be very good friends, now that one so soon to enter heaven has cared to make us known to each other."

A glad light broke over the dying man's face, and the friends gathered in the room thought sadly, "This might have been if John could only have lived." They remembered how careful he had been for the comfort of the young nurse, and that is about all people really know of one another.

The man of God still held Ruth's hand in his grasp, still held the failing one, while he repeated these words of prayer and consolation:

"'Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.' He is the 'only son of his mother, and she is a widow.' Our Father, we bring him to thee, thou only Source of help and comfort. We thank thee that this young man settled the questions of life, death and eternity in the days of his strength. We thank thee that he is ready, glad to answer thy summons to 'come up higher.' Now we give him thine own holy words of comfort: 'When

thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee;' 'In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you;' 'I go to prepare a place for you; I will come again, and receive you unto myself;' 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you;' 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid;' 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.'"

Christmas morning dawned clear and bright. Angels had sung, "Peace on earth, good-will to men," and men had caught up the strain and echoed it over the earth. Peace and gladness! but in that house rested the shadow of the gray angel. John Anderson lay on the couch in the cold and darkened parlor, his face the moulded clay of perfect manly beauty. Peace there was on lip and on brow, sadness in the hearts around him, and oh, such unutterable sadness waiting for two hearts far away toward the sunrise, never to hear his voice again, never to feel the clasp of his hand—not even to have the pitiful privilege of smooth-

ing the thick hair away from his cold brow! He died among strangers.

"Strangers were friends
All that long sad day;
Christ guided the boy
Through the unknown way."

From dying eyes looks out a strong yearning for dear faces, and tender words were spoken to the boy dying so far from home; gentle hands ministered unto him. Ruth Irving carefully fulfilled her sacred trust, and wrote out those last messages

"Dear as remembered kisses after death
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others."

Mrs. Jewell found time to write a black-bordered letter to the mourning mother far away on the foothills of the Green Mountains; Herbert and Eva Phelps mourned as for an only brother.

On Christmas morning Herbert Phelps found a bag of shining nickels beside his plate at the breakfast-table; a card pinned to it bore the name and address of the city missionary.

"She will know just what to do with them,"

said Jessie Fleming ; and all the others gave silent assent.

Two days later they listened to the words : " Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days and full of trouble ;" then they all went over and looked into a lone grave in Omaha's cemetery, and they all returned home thinking, " I went as far with him as I could go." Then his mourners walked about the streets.

Is my story a sad one ? That is because it is so true. Tens of thousands of young men go out from the valleys and down from the hills of the East with their faces toward the West, their hearts full of hope. Oh, the glory of their strong young manhood ! Oh, the plans they made the night before they left the old home ! They do not know that *they* can fail. In the old neighborhood at home they were boys ; in the West they will be men among men, and will take a manly part in the strife with men. From their ranks death takes many victims. A sudden cold neglected until there is not time to doctor it : the end is a lone grave in some Western cemetery. You who stay behind—and it is always hardest to stay behind—receive a

telegram that the boy is dead. Somebody writes a letter telling a few sad facts. Does the letter seem harsh and tell so little of the much you wanted to know? Remember, the heart which prompted it meant kindness, and it is hard to write the sort of a letter you long for. Perhaps they send home the boy's trunk. It is the one the whole family helped to pack the night before he went away. There is such a trunk standing in the next room; the pen with which I am writing traveled in it. The long hopeful letters have stopped coming; there is just a blank.

Now you go out of the west door at sunset; you take a long look down the way by which your dearest boy went forth. You wish you might stand by his grave and plant flowers on it; you wonder how the grave looks. Let me tell you, for I have stood beside one similar to it; I have parted the grasses over the lowly bed. Your boy's last home is on a bluff where the sunlight lingers longest at sunset. The summer grasses wave soft and cool above the sleeper's rest. Mother Nature has planted a sweet wild rose at his head and prairie-violets bloom at his feet. In winter the dainty buffalo-grass makes a rarer covering than you ever spread over his

childish form. The clear sky bends low ; the stars—those “ forget-me-nots of the angels ”—seem very near when you stand there. Bright spirits keep watch above the boy’s grave, for God was near to the lad who died among strangers.

CHAPTER XI.

GOING ON WITHOUT HIM.

"The dead had been faithful:
Why should I weep?"

AT the boarding-house life went on very much as of old—sadder, perhaps; for the memory of the unsodded grave was fresh among the boarders. But such low mounds make very little difference in the world's affairs.

"Every one can master a grief but he that has it." Last year I looked into an open grave. My neighbor said he was sorry, and went on making bright plans for his own future. Yesterday crape floated from my neighbor's door-bell; to-day his home is desolate, for the rain beats down on an unsodded grave just behind the hill. I have told him that I am sorry for him, and have come back to my writing; and "each heart knoweth its own bitterness."

We never realize how tall our friends are until

we see them lying low, wrapped in the lengths of winding-sheet; until then we never think how much of the pleasure of living was made up of the tones of voice, the odd sayings, the bright laughter, all the little ways which go to make one friend differ from another. So those people had never dreamed how much the life at the boarding-house had been brightened by the big-hearted man who so well could take a joke. The two days which the silent form had lain in the darkened parlor had done more to leave the impression of his character upon his fellow-boarders than months of active life had done. Some way, we never come to a full stop until our lives are punctuated by a coffin. Those people felt that John Anderson had been a true friend; they wondered when his place would be filled. But no living being can fill the place the dead left empty.

Herbert Phelps wrote long letters to the woman who had been a mother to his orphan boyhood. He looked after John's life-insurance money and hunted paying investments that the aged mother might live in comfort. All the while he carried about with him a heavy heart. Between these two men there had been a bond stronger than brother-love, and now

one of them was not; for a time the other lived a broken life.

Herbert put aside his own sorrow that he might cheer his sister, whose heart failed her because of the weakness of her body; the days were very sad for her because of the sorrow which she knew filled the heart of the only mother she had ever known. All the plans for moving the home to the West must be given up; she must abandon the thought of happiness when her playmate-sister should come out to them. Mary Anderson must go on teaching school in the little village in Vermont: there was no homeless John who needed her in Nebraska. Big, tender-hearted John had been the bond that united the family. It had been John's arms that held Eva, John's voice that comforted her, when she wept at the first parting with Herbert, years ago. She said that was the first fact in her history, for her memory went back no farther than that parting.

It was not Eva's nature to mope over trouble. The second day after the funeral a pale black-robed shadow of her former self crept down stairs and took her place at the table. She received a warm welcome, but she looked so spirit-like that her

friends feared she too would vanish from among them.

The parlor doors were again thrown open, but no one mentioned the Anti-Pun Enterprise and no one ventured a pun. There was a stronger home-feeling in the house than ever before, and there were more gatherings in the parlor for chatting or for music.

The days went on, and Eva gained rapidly in strength; soon she was to go back to her school-room. Many thick letters came from Denver, and, though she mourned sincerely, her hopes and her loves were in the future.

Ruth Irving went back to Dr. Ross and the bright room on Sixteenth street. The girl had made many warm friends in the last few weeks. There are no circumstances in life which more quickly cement the ties of friendship than does common anxiety over sickness or common sorrow at death. John Anderson's decease had made a deep impression on Ruth's mind. She had seen the parting of soul and body in its more repulsive phases; she had looked on the agony, the stolid indifference—had watched the slow passing of an unconscious soul; but that man had lain there in

the full possession of every faculty of mind and heart; he had looked calmly into a future which narrowed swiftly down to a stranger's grave. He had felt no fear; he was satisfied that it was well with him, and had thought of others' comfort to the last. He had trusted, with a faith simple as a little child's, in the love and mercy of Christ, and had gone into the valley of the shadow of death without any dread of what might there be awaiting him.

Ruth knew that that meant the possession of something which she had not—something which she did not understand. The triumph on that death-calmed face was not the result of guesswork: in the kind face of the preacher of the Christian's God she had read that the dying man knew wherein he trusted and whereof he spoke. The preacher's firm, solemn words of prayer sounded in her ears long after she had looked her last at the face of the man for whom he pleaded. She often thought, and thought deeply, on the subject; but the poor girl only met with more questions. She could not go back on a lifetime of skeptical teaching and place her faith in the Christian's Saviour simply on the evidence of one dying-bed. Still, Roy Ford's scoff-

ing hurt her as if he spoke lightly of some one whom she had known and loved.

As time went on these impressions grew dimmer. Ruth turned her face toward her love-colored future, and thought she had left behind John Anderson's life.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SKATING-RINK, OR HOMER?

"Troy, of rare riches and valor possessed,
Ruined fore'er by one beautiful guest."

THE healthfulness of the people of that young city was remarkable. The bracing winds and the pure air gave Westerners a new lease of life; therefore did doctors and nurses have ample time to cultivate their minds and to look after their friendships.

Ruth Irving saw much of her lover, and was very happy. At Christmas-time he had given her the betrothal-ring, but, as their engagement was to be kept a secret, she wore it, not on her finger, but on a ribbon placed around her neck. She listened to Eva's happy planning for the future, but made no admissions as to her own relations with Roy Ford. As for Mr. Ford, he divided his time into three parts—the night-work, the morning sleep and the

afternoon spent with Ruth. The joy of her days began with his coming.

The afternoons were almost always spent at the skating-rink. Mr. Ford was a fine skater, and Ruth speedily became fascinated with the sport. She gave her whole mind up to it, as she was apt to do to anything that interested her. She walked home at night with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, telling the Doctor that they had had a glorious time. But when Roy Ford was gone, she would sink into a chair saying she was nearly tired to death, and for hours would seem listless and weary of everything.

As time went on Dr. Ross began to be very glad that Mr. Ford was a night-worker: he could not monopolize Ruth's evenings. The Doctor grew into the habit of seeing many bugbears in Ruth's pathway. She had adopted the girl, and loved her in the place of uncles, aunts and cousins; not even a cat or a canary-bird hindered the tide of her affection flowing Ruthward. For the rest of mankind she entertained a kindly sympathy—for all except Roy Ford; she had no use for him. She looked on him much as she would have looked on a neighbor's ill-bred cat that might gaze wistfully at

a bird of hers. But Ruth was of more value than were many birds.

The more Dr. Ross loved Ruth, the more impossible it became for her to use her influence directly against Ruth's lover. If she offended the girl, she would add to Mr. Ford's influence, while she would only weaken her own. There was nothing to do but to wait, though she saw no good excuse for all Mr. Ford's attentions to Ruth. If he meant an honorable marriage, why did he not say so? He certainly had been through with all the usual preliminaries to such a statement. But the Doctor thought that Ruth had better not marry Roy Ford. The troubled medical-woman told herself that perhaps it was only a pleasant friendship, but Roy Ford was not the man for a pure friendship. If she had known of the engagement kept secret at the lover's request, she might have been roused to such a pitch of righteous indignation as to express some strong opinions on the subject without regard to results.

Sometimes Mr. Ford and the day-superintendent changed places, and so Ruth's lover had an evening to devote to her pleasure. These evenings were spent at the rink, or sometimes at a concert. Ruth

declared that Helen Ross should go with them unless her duties made it impossible ; the Doctor gladly went for love of the girl to whom she dared not say, "Ruth, you must not go with him." At the rink the Doctor watched Ruth's graceful circlings, and when the hour was over prepared to go home. Very much to Mr. Ford's disgust, Ruth would go with her. The Doctor locked her door that night and thanked God that Ruth was inside and safe.

The lovers came near quarreling next day.

"Ruthie," said Mr. Ford as they walked along the street, "do you know it was unkind of you to spoil my pleasure just for the sake of walking home with Dr. Ross?"

"Why, Roy, you did not expect her to go home alone, did you?"

"She would not mind it," he replied ; "she is used to going about alone."

"Roy Ford !" There was a dangerous light in Ruth's eyes. "I asked Dr. Ross to go with us, and she stayed as long as she could ; it was only common decency, to say nothing of courtesy, to take her home. I knew she would stay only a little while."

"Yes, but it was nonsense to spoil our pleasure

just to walk a few blocks in a brightly-lighted street. She does not mind going to see a patient alone; these professional women do not care for the little attentions which you enjoy."

At that unfortunate speech Ruth's temper blazed forth. She would not hear one slighting word for professional women—no, not even from Roy Ford.

"Roy Ford, to be a doctor makes her no more unwomanly than being a nurse makes me ungirlish," she cried.

"I know, Ruthie," he said. "It is not her profession, it is herself; she seems so strong and mannish!"

Roy seemed to think the word "mannish" ought to put Ruth's defence to flight.

"Yes, she is strong," said Ruth, "though bodily she is more frail than I. Her strength is a sort of heart-strength."

"I said she was mannish, did I not?" returned Roy.

"You said so, but she is not," Ruth retorted. "You don't know her. Besides that, 'strength' and 'mannishness' are not synonymous terms. I have observed that heart-strength or soul-strength is found more often in women than in men."

“Have your own sweet way, little girl,” said the fond lover, “but don’t get such an alarming amount of soul-strength. I don’t want an unwomanly wife.”

“Neither would Helen Ross make an unwomanly wife; she is as sweet and loving a home-woman as though she never saw the inside of a medical book. Not one woman in a hundred is more able than she to guide a home wisely.”

Ruth entered her own doorway without asking her lover to come in; a brief “Good-night” was all the farewell he received. He went whistling along the street, thinking, “She will be over her pet by to-morrow. It is not like her to be so put out over such a mighty little thing.”

Roy Ford had unwittingly touched the wrong chords; he did not know that Ruth had planned to be a doctor until love for him had conquered ambition. It was still a tender subject with her.

Dr. Ross never had the comfort of knowing that she was the cause of the first quarrel between those lovers, but the fact proved that her policy in the war of love was a wise one. She kept on waiting, and tried to interest Ruth in other lives and other studies. She knew Ruth’s mental abilities were far

above Roy Ford's; she hoped the girl might outgrow her need of him.

Ruth and Helen had gone one night to attend a "family gathering" at the boarding-house. The Doctor was charmed with Mrs. Jewell and her family; they, in turn, were delighted with her. Both the Doctor and Ruth learned to speak of "going home" when they spoke of calling on motherly Mrs. Jewell.

Helen Ross wondered how Ruth Irving, after knowing such men as Herbert Phelps, Mr. Fremont and Charlie Hills, could possibly spend so much time with Roy Ford. Ruth was in love with Roy Ford, and Dr. Ross was not.

Mrs. Jewell was the centre of life at the boarding-house, as a sweet, womanly mother is the source of pleasure with a family of sons and daughters. She often said to herself, "These should have been my children." She had outlived the bitterness of the memory of the graves on the Eastern hillside. The work she had forced herself to do for others had brought a loving care for all young people. She said, "My sons would have had John Anderson's genial ways and Herbert Phelps's tender care for their sisters; my daughters would wear the fair, sweet beauty of

Eva Phelps or Jessie Fleming's bright face." The young people were dear to her because of what her children must have been had God been willing. In return for her devotion, she received love and care from sons and daughters not her own; they made her one among them in all their plans for rest and pleasure. There was a spirit of good-natured rivalry among "the boys" as to which one should be allowed to show her the most attention; they were proud of their "prior past" girl, as she laughingly termed herself.

This woman's soul would always be young; her face had not lost its youthfulness even though it had long been shaded by silver hair framed in a widow's veil. She deserved much courtesy at the younger people's hands. She made a home instead of presiding over a boarding-house. Scarcely a week went by that she did not leave her door on the arm of one of "her boys;" they took her away from her cares to lecture or concert, or for a swift ride over the bluffs and divides near Omaha.

The evening at the Doctor's the talk turned to the scientific discoveries being made in the Orient—a subject in which these people were much interested.

"The Y. M. C. A. lecture-course will give us one treat in that line of study," said Mr. Phelps.

"What is the subject?" asked Dr. Ross.

"Troy as unearthed by Dr. Schliemann," he replied.

"That will be grand. Who is to give the lecture?"

"A Mr. Parsons," said Mr. Hills. "I understand that Mr. Parsons was with Dr. Schliemann a portion of the time the latter spent in the work at Troy; he speaks from what he saw on the ground."

"He will show us the house of Priam blackened with fire," said Eva Phelps.

"Yes?" said Dr. Ross.

"I am not given to hunting for a moral," said Mr. Hills, "but it seems to me we might find a sermon in those ruins. Poor old Homer had to be very patient; it took three thousand years for his word to be proved."

Ruth's studies had stopped short of Homer's *Iliad*; she did not understand what those people were talking about. Dr. Ross saw it, and, while she felt sorry for Ruth, was delighted with the discovery. She could create dissension between Ruth and her lover, and do it in a perfectly honor-

able way : she knew the story of Troy would rouse Ruth to the highest pitch of interested excitement.

While the Doctor planned the talk went on ; they all decided to attend the lecture. Mr. Phelps agreed to get tickets for the whole party.

Dr. Ross began at once to carry out her plans ; while she made ready for rest that night she told the story of the beautiful Helen and the faithless Paris, who left his fair bride CEnone to mourn among the pine forests of Mount Ida. She spoke of Menelaus and Agamemnon, of the doomed Achilles and the wise Ulysses. She made the story bright and brief, and was more than repaid when Ruth said, as she gave her pillow a vigorous shaking,

“ My school-days ended when Mrs. Irving’s sickness began, but I must study more. I am going to save my pennies after this ; maybe I can manage a term or two at the high school, if I can do no better. I must read about all that while I am out of work.”

“ I have a translation of the *Iliad*,” said the Doctor ; “ we can read it together, for I should enjoy going over it again.”

Helen’s mind was full of plans. This lecturer,

with his account of modern discoveries, would prove the earthly existence of Homer's Troy. Are not Nineveh and Babylon now giving up testimony written in stone as to the truth of the Bible?

"Oh, Helen, wake up! Where is your *Homer*? I can read a while before breakfast."

These words mixed with the Doctor's morning dreams. She opened her eyes to see Ruth already dressed and taking book after book from the shelves.

Dr. Ross found the *Iliad*, and while she coiled her glossy hair she made suggestions and lectured on Greek history. Her toilet was finished, and there was still half an hour before breakfast-time; she sat down and began the wonderful story of Homer's Troy. Ruth listened eagerly. Mrs. Jewell, Mr. Hills, Herbert and Eva Phelps and Jessie Fleming had talked of these things, while she knew nothing of them, but she was going to learn much of them before the lecture. She spent the morning in reading Homer, and almost regretted putting away the book when Mr. Ford called in the afternoon.

The Doctor's office-hours were not over, so Ruth

went with her lover into the brightness of the outside day. She insisted on going for a walk instead of skating; she was ready to forgive Mr. Ford's ungracious remarks of the evening before. She had told herself, "He does not know Helen as well as I do. How can I expect him to love her so much?"

Ruth told all about the lecture and her plans for reading Homer, and wished that Roy might read with them.

"Why, child, what ideas you do get into your head!" and this sensible young man laughed heartily. "That whole story is only a—a sort of—of fable. There never was any Troy, or—or Homer, either, for that matter. Most likely the man who is to lecture here is a fraud."

"Have you ever read the story?" asked Ruth, very quietly.

"Why, no; I don't spend my time reading such books."

"Then don't talk to me of things about which you know nothing," laughed Ruth as she gave the young man's coat-sleeve a dainty little pat.

The night of the lecture came, clear and cold. The boarding-house party called for Dr. Ross and

Ruth Irving. It was a merry company that boarded the street-cars on their way to the Young Men's Christian Association hall. They listened to a delightful lecture on Dr. Schliemann's discoveries in the charred ruins of Troy, the Ilion whose terrible fate inspired the immortal Greek poet. Every word gave Ruth's ambitions a new impulse; roused by her recent reading of Homer, she was bent on reaching after other good things in history and literature.

"What a debt the world owes to Dr. Schliemann!" said Mr. Fremont as he passed into the street with Mrs. Jewell on one arm and Ruth Irving on the other.

"Yes," said Mrs. Jewell; "he has proved that Troy had other existence than among the Muses who dwell on Mount Olympia."

"I wonder if Mrs. Schliemann is an advocate of universal suffrage?" said Ruth.

"She has proved herself her husband's equal in the qualities of faith and courage," remarked Mr. Fremont.

"Mrs. Schliemann is my ideal of a true wife," said Herbert Phelps, coming up with Dr. Ross and Eva.

"Do you know where the sun rises upon just such another?" asked Mrs. Jewell.

"Mrs. Jewell, I must confess that I do not; or if I do, some other man has found her before I have," was the reply.

As the party waited on the corner for the street-car Mr. Phelps said,

"Eva, do you think that you could help to unearth a buried city?" They were all gathered close around her the better to shield her from the wind, which blew too roughly for one not quite strong.

"'A living wall of human wood,'" said Eva, laughingly.—"No, Herbert; I do not think I should choose to do it if I could. It would give me a disagreeable sense of prying into other people's business. Espionage is not my *forte*."

"Hear that from a teacher of chemistry!" cried Mr. Hills.—"Why, Miss Phelps, I thought you spent your life in prying into and expounding secrets?"

"Nature is never ashamed of her secrets; some people are ashamed of theirs. It is hard work properly to manage the traditional skeleton. I never did know what to do with other people's secrets."

"I keep them," laughed Dr. Ross.

"Yes; that is the proper thing to do," replied Eva. "Once I rummaged in an old house which had been closed for years. In one room I found a package of faded flowers, odd gloves, and the like; I looked at them, and wondered who had treasured them. As I was about to tie them up I found written on the wrapper, 'To be burned unopened after I am dead.' It seemed as though I had desecrated the sepulchre of some one's heart-secrets; that some Vandal had been there before was small comfort."

"Miss Phelps," said the irrepressible Charlie Hills, "please promise me that you never will repeat those remarks. A woman without curiosity would be such an attraction for a dime museum! You would not be safe. Besides, you will upset all our theories on womanly curiosity."

All laughed and entered the street-car, while Ruth Irving thought of the dead man's secret she kept for Eva's sake.

"I have made up my mind that it is not safe to keep a diary," said Mr. Fremont when the ladies were seated and the men stood up and hung gracefully to the straps which street-car companies kindly

furnish for the comfort of the sterner sex in case the seat-room fails.

"We do not write our sermons in stones," said Dr. Ross.

"I should not wish to be hurried if I were to set my house in order for the light of three thousand years to come," said Mrs. Jewell.

"True," said Mr. Phelps; "I tremble for Hills's reputation if his dressing-case, in every-day order, were to be canned for the inspection of future generations."

"Oh, there would be nothing the matter with that," said Mr. Hills, cheerfully. "Some scientific person would write it up for the holiday number of the *Fiftieth Century*; he would shed much light on our manners and customs. I shall have my name carved on all my toilet-articles, and the linguist will read it, the scientific man will echo 'Hills! hills! Why, it was supposed that this was prairie-land.' Then they will go and revise all their theories regarding ancient Omaha."

"I want all you people in my dining-room," said Mrs. Jewell as these "people" left the car. "Eva must have some soup; I don't approve of trying to sleep when one's stomach is empty."

They all filed into the house, a company of very happy people.

"This shall be a 'suffering men's supper,'" said Mr. Fremont. "Hills and I will cook the oysters; the rest of the masculines must wash the dishes.—Mrs. Jewell, I trust you will submit very gracefully?"

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Jewell!" cried Mr. Hills. "I am sure you long to test the Hilly method of getting up the most intellectual oyster;" and Mr. Hills borrowed some pins and began to fasten his handkerchief on in the place of an apron.

"I may submit to your cookery, but never to that apron:" and Mrs. Jewell brought out two large white aprons, which the would-be cooks put on and then started for the kitchen.

If Mrs. Jewell felt any feminine apprehension for her kitchen-utensils, she bravely suppressed them, and with the others awaited the call to supper.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you will please consider our faces as black as our souls are white, and come out to supper," was Charlie Hills's announcement.

"How is this, Doctor?" asked Mr. Fremont as he passed the soup. "They taught me that it was an unhealthy practice to eat just before bedtime."

"If you should give up all unhealthy practices, you would do very little of anything in this world," replied the Doctor. "Little pigs eat and then go right to sleep; so do all other young and healthy creatures. Why should we humans differ from all nature? Let me give you a little professional advice."

"Certainly, Doctor, for I remember that

‘A wise physician skill’d our wounds to heal
Is more than armies to the public weal.’

"What is your advice?"

"It is this," laughed the Doctor: "if it ever becomes your sad duty to walk the floor until somebody's baby has cried itself to sleep, offer the child a drink of milk. Most likely the poor little thing cries for no other reason in the world than because it is hungry."

"Thank you," said Mr. Fremont.—"Phelps, you don't mind waiting while I note that down, do you?" and, whisking out his note-book, he wrote rapidly. Then he triumphantly read:

"‘Feed the baby: it is hungry.

‘‘H. A. Ross, M. D.’”

"Such forgery never can be allowed," said Mr. Phelps; "Dr. Ross writes her prescriptions in a dead language."

"Yes," replied the Doctor, "but there would be fewer dead people if doctors wrote their prescriptions in good, sensible, every-day American."

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF WORK.

“O man! a brave and godlike race!
But you can be so vile and base!
And when there is no urgent need,
You can protect us well indeed.

* * * * *

When we are crushed with want and dread,
Then we have most from you to fear.”

AT first Ruth enjoyed idleness very much; she was tired, and needed rest. The duties of nurse are not a light burden for a girl of nineteen, and Ruth had borne these burdens for three years. Young as she was, she was mistress of the arts of securing quiet, coolness and comfort for a sick person. This means that she was a thoroughly womanly woman. For two weeks it was delightful to have no work to do, to have ample time to enjoy Mr. Ford's society, or, when he was not available, to run in and chat with Mrs. Jewell

or with Eva Phelps. Oh the wide range of woman's chat ! Her conversational resources include everything from Homer to rick-rack braid and paper flowers.

After a time Ruth began to wish for work ; there were urgent reasons for so doing. There is nothing earthly which can be sustained without money. She had been a foolish virgin, and had lived fully up to her income ; she had no money wherewith to buy oil for the purpose of lubricating her daily life. Improvident ? Yes. So is our nation.

Bills for the necessities of life counted up frightfully. Rent was very high, for the young city was adding to its population by thousands every year ; house-building could not keep pace with the demand for shelter. The cost of a foothold was surprising, but the rent of those two fair rooms was a serious matter in the lives of our workers. Rent must be paid in advance ; after Ruth had contributed her share of the March rent her purse looked, she said, as though an elephant had stepped on it. She had been obliged to spend some money for clothing, and her board-bill was paid up to date. They had cooked many little suppers

on the Garland stove as a means of keeping that bill within reasonable bounds.

One evening Ruth moved restlessly about the room, as was her habit when thinking. Dr. Ross studied her medical-book and paid no attention to Ruth's restlessness; she recognized this as one of Ruth's moods, and these women seldom questioned each other. In that fact was one of the secrets of their happiness together; they knew that no human being wants to be interviewed all the time. Ruth did not speak of her troubles, for three years' contact with the world had taught her the propriety of keeping her own secrets, and other people's also; now that she had a friend in whom she could trust, it was hard overcoming the habit of reticence acquired when her life knew no Helen Ross.

Dr. Ross had always shared her troubles with her gentle mother; with her whole soul she wished for some one to speak to, and, trusting Ruth implicitly, she talked of her personal affairs with comical gravity. Ruth listened, laughed, counseled or consoled as the case required, and went on bearing her burdens alone. The Doctor thought it was "Ruth's way," for the burst of confidence

on the evening of our first meeting was the only one she had ever received.

At last Ruth sat down in front of her friend; she expressed herself on this wise:

"Dr. Ross, do put up that inevitable *Nervous Diseases*. Listen to me one minute."

"Say 'Helen,' and I will," was the reply.

"How can I say 'Helen' over all that pile of medical lore? No; 'doctor' is the only name that fits you now. Whom have you designs upon, that you are so studious?"

"The whole human race," said the Doctor, laughingly. "There, Ruth! I have removed the bone of contention; speak your mind, sister."

"Well, Helen, I am going to board myself—at least, I shall until I get another case. I have nothing to do; so I might as well look up the science set forth in the cook-books."

"It is a good idea; I will board with you. No, we will not call it 'boarding;' let us say we will live at home. That of itself will be a delightful change."

"Helen, I am afraid you are growing sarcastic. Check such tendencies, I beg you. Of course we will not confess that we cook our own meals

because it is cheaper. Oh no ; it is because our souls long for a stew-pan and a dish-cloth. Yes, I believe we can save quite a little by the experiment. I should have tried it before, but I kept thinking that I should have work before long ; now my ideas on that subject are very misty."

"Don't lose courage, Ruthie," said the Doctor, cheerfully ; "times will soon be better. When shall we begin our housekeeping?"

"You blessed old cheerybody !" cried Ruth. "We will begin at once. Yes ; we will take breakfast at home. I will go right after some groceries."

Ruth put on her hat and cloak and allowed the Doctor to return to her medical-book in peace. So it was that they cooked their own meals on the Garland stove, after their manner on the night of our first meeting.

This kind of gypsy life has its charms, and these women enjoyed it. Everything in the bread-line could be bought ready baked ; it was fresh and wholesome. That left little cooking to do, for they lived very simply. But even uncooked food costs money. Ruth felt that she must not spend her last cent ; the only thing to do was to get trusted at the corner grocery. She would have work soon, and

would then be able to pay the bill. The shrewd Dane who kept the store was willing to trust her. Of course he was. He knew Ruth was an honest young woman; he knew her work was well paid. Moreover, she had spent many shekels at his counter for fruit, candy, and the like. He desired that she should continue to do so.

Ruth had always avoided debt; now she felt that there was no other way out of her troubles. Debt—bad enough in the best circumstances—is a terrible thing for a woman alone in the world; but Ruth had to live, and this was before Mr. Ruskin said, “Starve and go to heaven, but don’t borrow. Try, first, begging—I don’t mind, if it is really needful, stealing; but don’t buy things you can’t pay for.”

Ruth was not wise above her day and her generation; she thought she had found the best way out of her troubles, and perhaps she had. She repaired her clothing and went through with that mysterious process which women call “turning a dress.” She studied eagerly and kept herself bright for Roy’s sake. No; it was for the sake of her own self-respect, because that is one of the instincts of a true woman’s soul. She would have been neat and

beautiful though set down alone in the middle of the "Great American Desert."

Time went on, and no one called for Ruth's services; she began to grow desperate. Sometimes she thought of telling Roy Ford how troubled she was, but he never spoke of such matters, and pride kept her silent. He talked of their future home, but did not mention an early marriage nor speak of any little economy he might practice with a view to hastening the happy day. He mentally constructed and furnished for her the home in which he would like to place her, but he said nothing of beginning in two rooms. Alas for the "beehive made of straw"!

Mr. Ford made fun of Ruth's plans for study, and assured her that she knew enough already; all which remarks only excited her laughter. Dr. Ross was her definition of a "strong-minded woman;" she could fancy no one sweeter or more gentle than this same doctor. Homer would have been more interesting if Ruth could have read with Roy and asked him the thousand questions inspired thereby, but he did not see this, nor could he have answered her questions; so Ruth was ready with some query every time she went to the boarding-

house, where everybody seemed to have ideas and to know how to express them. She hid away her troubles, laughed gayly, enjoyed the little gatherings at Mrs. Jewell's and went to the skating-rink with her lover.

It grew near the first of March, and still no work; the Danish grocer began to mention the little bill. Altogether, it was a discouraging state of things. Ruth was simply out of work, and the larger portion of the world has learned at some time or other what that means. Why did she keep on waiting for some one to get sick? Why did she not try to do something besides nursing? She was a nurse, and nothing else; besides that, there was nothing else to do.

Roy Ford looked on, and knew far more of Ruth's affairs than she imagined. He bided his time. He started a report that Miss Irving would do no more nursing, and thereby kept work from her.

Dr. Ross and Ruth Irving sat one night in their cozy rooms; they were both busy with their "week's mending," for they were very real people, and needed such commonplace comforts as buttons and darning-cotton. The door-bell rang.

"I hope that is a case for me," said Ruth as she walked toward the door; but her greeting was, "Good-evening, Mr. Phelps. Come in! I told the Doctor that I hoped the bell meant a case; now I am sorry that I said it."

"There is no harm done, Miss Irving.—Good-evening, Dr. Ross. Were you as charitably inclined as this young lady?"

"I made no wish, Mr. Phelps; I have learned to look for the unexpected."

"I am 'the unexpected,' am I? Where is my hat? No; on second thought, I will stay and punish you for that speech. Please observe that I am a committee of one."

"Yes?" said the Doctor, thoughtfully, as though in her inner consciousness she might have had doubts on the subject.

"We are all going to be at home this evening, and are going to have some music. I am looking up the members of the family. Mrs. Jewell charged me to bring you both even if I had to get out a writ of *habeas corpus*; so wrap yourselves up warmly. You are both weary of sewing, and that bit of steel is tired of having its head punched."

"Ruthie, I think we might as well go peaceably," said the Doctor; so they made ready.

"My soul has been hungry for music all day," said Dr. Ross as they passed into the street.

"You play, do you not, Miss Ross?" asked Mr. Phelps.

"No; not on a piano," she answered. "I was always too busy to learn how, but I love music, and often wish that I might make it."

"She does make it," said Ruth. "I will confess for her: the Doctor's soul delights in solo-singing."

"Ruth, you dreadful!" laughed the Doctor.

"Be careful how you step, ladies," said Mr. Phelps. "It is much warmer since sunset, and the light snow of the afternoon has melted. I found it very slippery."

"It is—very," said Ruth. "This is a native crossing, is it not?"

"These are the paths the braves have trod," said Mr. Phelps.

This was before the days of Omaha's beautiful asphalt pavements. One must have a personal acquaintance with Nebraska mud in order fully to understand it. Fancy a substance as slippery as

ice, as black as tar, and which sticks like the traditional poor relation, and you will partly understand its nature.

Mr. Phelps continued :

“ Mr. Hills says he once spent two whole days in trying to find a fit comparison for Nebraska mud ; at last he gave it up in despair.”

“ I did not think him so faint-hearted,” said Ruth. “ It reminds me of the doctrine of total depravity.”

“ I think the soil of the garden of Eden must have been chemically much the same as that of the ‘ Bug-Eaters’ State,’ ” said Dr. Ross. Just then one of her rubbers came off, and they paused while it was being replaced.

“ I tied on my rubbers,” said Mr. Phelps.

“ I have often done so,” replied the Doctor, “ but I did not think it necessary to-night. Never mind ; it all helps make up our experience in this Western country.”

A warm welcome was waiting for new arrivals. Mrs. Jewell had brought blooming plants from the large window in the dining-room and placed them on bracket-shelves in the parlor. There were the fragrance of flowers, soft air, the cheer of home

and its happy hearts, and all forgot that they were strangers and pilgrims in a boarding-house.

"Our walk will prove of great benefit to modern science," said Mr. Phelps when they were seated.

"How so?" asked Mr. Fremont.

"Our scientific friend Dr. Ross has solved the great question; she has found the connecting-link, so to speak. I am going to steal her thunder, and to-morrow settle many of humanity's vexing questions."

"Oh, those ideas are all copyrighted," laughed Ruth.

"And I might have made my fortune! I have missed my one chance." Mr. Phelps leaned back in his chair, groaning in mock agony.

"Oh, Herbert," cried Eva, "please explain yourself. How you do run on!"

"You see, Sis," he replied, "it is like this: Dr. Ross says Nebraska mud is chemically much the same as that used in the make-up of the first man, Adam. Now, history shows that he and all his children—I should say all his boys—were full of total depravity unto this day.—Can't help it, Sis; it is a good strong expression. It means just what I

want to say.—My idea was this: find the chemical antidote for this treacherousness in our sidewalks, and from that—the antidote, not the sidewalks—make a panacea for all human woe. Of course we will put it up in dollar bottles. My! how it will sell!”

“You would take rank with Abou ben Adhem as one who loves his fellow-men,” said Mrs. Jewell.

“That dollar-a-bottle business proves his philanthropy,” added Charlie Hills.

“Name it ‘Moral Soda,’” said Miss Fleming.

“That I will!” laughed Mr. Phelps. “I will sell it to school-teachers and lawyers’ copyists at reduced rates—fifteen per cent. off, I think.”

“There is no one here who needs a bit of it,” said Mrs. Jewell; “I would not have one of you improved if I could. Besides that, you are wasting time. I want some music.”

Mrs. Jewell had music to her heart’s content—quartettes, duets, solos, both grave and gay. Nothing very scientific, of course, but there were no scientific people there to listen.

Herbert Phelps sang “The Harvest-Time is Passing By.” The spirit of Music seemed to dwell in Miss Quick’s fingers as she played Handel’s

“Angels Ever Bright and Fair;” Dr. Ross sang “Strength for To-Day;” Jessie Fleming said she could not sing, but she softly played and softly whistled “Nothing but Leaves;” Charlie Hills said he never sang white music, and so he favored them with “The Little Cabins am Empty Now;” whereupon Mrs. Jewell found an old copy of *Jubilee Singers* and sang “Mary and Martha have just Gone Along.” This was a new departure; few of her boarders had heard her sing. Of late years she had had no songs in her heart, but in her girlhood her soul had overflowed with melody. Now she lacked practice, but her voice was sweet, and her family would not be satisfied with one song. She said she was not up in modern music, and brought out a book of war-songs—one of the fruits of the civil war. Then she sang “Somebody’s Darling” and “Send them Home Tenderly.” Then the young people tried “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “The Faded Coat of Blue.” It was the first time some of those young people ever heard those songs. So far have those bloody times slipped into history that we, the young men and the young women of to-day, know little of our nation’s night-time songs.

Mr. Fremont walked home with Ruth. She talked brightly, but her thought was, "If Roy had been there, how I should have enjoyed it!" Dr. Ross and Herbert Phelps exchanged views as to the chemical properties of the total-depravity side of human nature.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DREAM, AND ITS CAUSE.

“The night’s dismay
Saddened and stunned the coming day ;
Sleep, the wide blessing, seemed to me
Distemper’s worst calamity.”

RUTH IRVING shut the door with a bang. She shot the bolt into place with a force which made it ring ; the key gave an emphatic click in the lock. The noise almost drowned Roy Ford’s departing footsteps ; that was just what Ruth wanted it to do. She was shutting him out of her life for ever ; she understood him at last. And this was the man she had loved ! She was almost wild with anger. Her eyes flashed, her cheeks glowed with wrath. Surely “hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” She took his ring from the ribbon around her neck and dropped it on the glowing coals. How the memory of certain loving words and kisses scorched her soul ! If she could have

burned all memory of that man, the cremation would have done her soul good.

Ah ! this is a Christian country—a world run on humane principles ! We imprison a man for stealing bread to feed his starving children, and pass by on the other side of the street when faith in God and man, hope, trust and innocence, are slain, perhaps to have no resurrection.

Ruth Irving will remember that hour to her dying day. This was the man whom she had chosen. Yes, this was he : what were the others of his kind ? God help the girl who thus loses her faith in manhood. Ruth had looked on her lover as her equal. Yes, more than that : she had looked up to him as one who was to be her protector and helper while life lasted. She had thought to lean on him and be upheld, and now her faith in manhood was gone. She had not told her nearest friend of her engagement ; she must keep the knowledge of this insult from her. This much Ruth's self-respect demanded. True, Ruth was used to taking care of herself. She had much knowledge of the world—more, perhaps, than was good for her. So did Eve have a knowledge of the garden of Eden before she gave way to the tempting of the serpent

and ate that apple plucked from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Dr. Ross was with a very sick child; Ruth wondered when she would return. The girl made the room cheerful for the Doctor's coming, shaded the lamp and drew the easiest chair to the stove, then placed Helen's slippers before it; she looked after every little detail for her friend's comfort. When the clock struck eleven, Ruth went to bed to lie with close-shut eyes and all appearance of sleep, but with thoughts madly chasing one another through her mind.

Dr. Ross came home and moved softly about the room; she lay down beside Ruth, who feigned sleep. Slowly the girl's memory was going back over her past life in search of something to which she could anchor. She wanted some sure foundation—something that would help her to begin anew. Thought stopped in the room where a good man lay dying on that last Christmas eve. Could those friends be trusted? She thought of the motherly Mrs. Jewell, and her heart cried for a mother-hand to guide her out of her deep trouble. She thought of Herbert Phelps and his pure-hearted sister, but Ruth never had had a brother. She thought of John Anderson

and his love for Eva Phelps; she groaned in misery as she remembered that the love given her had been a different kind of love from that which made John Anderson say faintly, "Love has made a better man of me." The tender words she had written for the mourning mother came back to her. Surely that man was worthy of trust. Ah! his works do follow him; but he died, and manly virtue died with him. Then came the words of the man of prayer. Ruth remembered every one of them, for it was the only prayer she had heard in months. Slowly she repeated it, and then moaned as she remembered that those words were for John Anderson, not for her; there was no "Let not your heart be troubled" for her. And she was right. Jehudi's penknife cut away the whole roll. There is no "I will not leave you comfortless" for the one who cuts out the first chapter of Genesis; no "In my Father's house are many mansions" for him who cuts out the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses of the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. There is no "Thy Maker is thy husband" for the widowed one who with scientific scissors clips out "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." There is a legend of an Arabian king

who built a splendid city. As he looked on its beauty his heart was puffed up with pride, and he determined to build a palace which should rival the mansions of paradise. He was punished for his presumption : he and his subjects were destroyed, and his palace and his gardens were placed under a perpetual spell which hides them from the sight of men. Ruth Irving thought her love and her lover brighter and better than the love of the Christian's God. Her idol proved to be clay, and the trail of the serpent destroyed all her dream-palaces.

At last Ruth fell asleep, and, sleeping, dreamed. She wandered far out on the sweet spring prairies. The clear air and the bright sunshine seemed to make every sense almost painfully acute. She heard the meadow-lark's clear whistle, the chirp of a thousand insects and the soft murmur of waters in the distance. She seemed to see each feather-like blade of dainty buffalo-grass, the notched-leaf prairie-violet grew at her feet. As she wandered on she came to a river guarded by bluffs made blue by lupine blossoms ; she knew by the turbid waters that she stood by the Missouri. While she looked a wretched craft appeared in sight, and its one passenger—Roy Ford—pointed down, down,

down. She turned in fright. From the top of a flower-covered bluff, with form outlined against a clear blue sky, John Anderson beckoned her to him, but a strange fascination held her to the spot.

“Ruth! Ruthie! Wake up! What is the matter?” and Ruth became conscious that Dr. Ross was calling her, was shaking her vigorously and bathing her face in strong perfume.

At last Ruth struggled until free from the terrible chains which seemed to bind her. She was awake. Thank God! The fright had been so great that she lay like one exhausted from a fever. Dr. Ross realized something of the terror through which she had passed, and strove by every means in her power to exorcise the dark spirit.

Ruth was thankful for the morning light, for the dark waters of her dream became less distinct. She began her morning duties just as of old, but Dr. Ross interfered:

“Ruth, my child, you must sit down; I shall do all the work this morning. You must play sick. Do you know that I think you skated too much yesterday? That accounts for your troubled sleep. You look as if you had seen a ghost.”

“If you think skating was the cause of my

dream, I will not skate any more," said Ruth, wearily, while she had her own views as to the cause of her troubled sleep.

Dr. Ross thought that she had gained a victory over the rink, and very wisely suppressed a good deal of thankfulness.

This was not the same Ruth who had cooked the dainty breakfast the morning before. The girl had been down into the depths of her soul where only suffering could take her—such suffering as leaves on the face a trace akin to the dignity of the death-stamp. She shivered in the morning sunlight as she thought of the dark waters of her dream, on which Roy Ford's wretched craft barely floated. Then she thought of the fair sky and the green flowery bluffs to which John Anderson beckoned her. She resolved to follow. She thought the best way to begin would be to live like the pure-hearted girl whom he loved.

Ruth was not heartbroken. She had loved Roy Ford very much—that is, she had loved the man she thought he was; now she was angry and disappointed. The wind had changed quarters; her little storm-tossed life-boat had veered square around. Her life should be managed on principles diametrically opposed to any she had ever heard Mr. Ford

advance. It was Sunday morning; there was no better way to begin than by going to the church she knew John Anderson had attended when he was yet alive. It might be that the man of the bedside prayer would have something to say which did mean her.

Dr. Ross never knew of the fierce battle fought so close beside her or what was the price of this victory of peace, but a kind God knew, and sent a strong and gentle angel to keep this lonely, homeless girl who clung to the right though it was at the price of the dearest that life held for her.

CHAPTER XV.

THAT STRANGER OUR NEIGHBOR.

“The word ‘neighbor’ means our obligation, near and far, to every man whose life contains any want that we can fill.”

THE saying so common in the West, “Most people leave their religion behind them when they cross the Mississippi,” seems quite unfounded; religion is not alarmingly plentiful even east of that noble river. It takes a great amount of moral courage to attend church in a strange place—perhaps more to attend an Eastern than a Western church. There may be fine singing, but there might as well be none if no kind voice utters a welcome for the stranger, if no warm hand throws a bond of fellowship about him. In bitter homesickness has many a one gone out from God’s house and said with the Psalmist, “No man cared for my soul.” No one spoke to him, and perhaps he does not go any more; by and by he leaves his religion behind. All this may not be right, but it is

human nature, and some fashionable church is the border-line, and not the Mississippi River.

"But they go out so quickly we don't have a chance to speak to them," you say. What about being "instant in season"? Doubtless people do go out quickly: no one likes to be frozen.

Before me seem to pass the long line of people who are often obliged to be "that stranger." I plead for them. Pastors, Sunday-school teachers, old residents, don't let any one go out next Sunday from a company of brothers and sisters by Christ's blood and carry a heart chilled in a refrigerator where Christians form the ice.

Dr. Ross was called out very early that morning. Ruth made ready for church. She was not in the habit of going to church; she had gone sometimes with Dr. Ross, but she said she did not like that minister. Of late she had not been to church at all. There is nothing easier to find than a good excuse, and Ruth had not cared to attend church. Things were different now, however; she was glad over the brightness of the day, and felt safer when she joined the crowds who moved churchward at the hour for service.

As Ruth entered the wide church doors her eyes

fell upon a large card posted in a conspicuous part of the porch :

STRANGERS
ARE CORDIALLY REQUESTED TO REMAIN
AND SPEAK WITH THE PASTOR.

A pleasant voice said,

“Good-morning, Miss Irving! I am glad to see you. Let me introduce you to some of my people.—Mr. Watchful, this is Miss Irving, a resident of our city who follows Christ in that she cares for his sick.—Mrs. Godly, you will be glad to know Miss Irving.—Mr. Greatheart, will you show Miss Irving to a seat?”

It seemed to Ruth that this pastor talked all the time, and, some way or other, people found plenty of chance to speak their minds. Everybody looked as friendly as though the chief desire of his heart was to have people—strangers in particular—attend this church.

Ruth followed her pilot to a seat, and almost held her breath in amazement. How came that minister—she always supposed that ministers were rather inferior men—how came he to remember

the name of a nurse whom he had met but once, and that in a sick-room two months before?

The solemn service began. The sweet-toned organ-voluntary, the invocation, the tender chanting of the Lord's Prayer, the grand anthem,—none of it was for her. Then she listened to the reading of that wonderful second chapter of Revelation. The voice went on through the solemn warnings and grand promises: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Ruth frowned as if the words "new name" had stirred a dark memory, and said to herself, "All that means John Anderson, not me." Then came the voice of prayer, and all meant some one else. No; he was pleading for the stranger—earnestly, as if he knew the stranger was before him. Surely he meant Ruth when he said, "Lord, cover the graves in the stranger's heart with thy flowers." How should this preacher know of the grave in her heart where she had so lately buried her dearest dream and her faith in manhood? He knew that never does an audience gather but somebody carries a grave in his heart.

Standing there with a teacher's Bible open on his extended palm, this pastor looked into his people's faces. In those upturned faces he read of discouragement, of trial, of doubts, of longing for a better life, for comfort; he read of homesickness and the marks of the struggle which brought victory. On Ruth Irving's face there was a half-desperate look, and he knew this young nurse needed a friend—needed some sort of comfort or help. This pastor was a man of much sanctified common sense; he knew all this must be given very adroitly.

Ruth pondered his words in her heart while she listened to the next hymn, and then came the text, "Antipas, my faithful martyr." Well, she had no mind to be a martyr even though this Antipas had been remembered eighteen hundred years by the bare fact that he was a martyr. She felt a glow of enthusiasm over the vivid picture of the glory of the self-renunciation of martyrdom, but she had no desire to practice it. No; this was not for her. But wait; he was talking about faithfulness. There he struck the keynote of Ruth's nature. What had she to be faithful to? Only her womanly purity. She would be faithful, come what might. She lis-

tened to the closing words, and drew all the comfort she could from them. Her face was very earnest.

Ruth was surprised when she met the pastor at the church door; he was there shaking hands with everybody and talking to half a dozen different people at once. Ruth thought he was promising to do something for everybody; she heard him promise to call on three sick people, look after Widow Shaw's wayward son, write a letter of recommendation and see about work for some one else. He was to do all this the very next day, and he said,

"Miss Irving, may I call on you? I could come almost any time when you think that you will be at home."

Ruth gave her address, and was surprised when the pastor promised to call the very next morning, saying briskly,

"I think I will find you before some one calls you to duty."

Ruth Irving had always supposed that ministers had very easy times, but this busy man gave up his only leisure-hour for the next week that he might call on her. There was a tumult in her mind when she reached home. She never had talked with a minister for ten minutes in her life. She supposed

ministers considered themselves too good to have much in common with ordinary people ; she thought they talked of nothing but death and eternity. She expected this minister would talk of death or religion every minute of his call, and maybe interview her as to the secrets of her inmost soul. But her face was toward John Anderson's flower-crowned bluff ; his last whisper had been to introduce her to his well-loved pastor. Surely John's pastor could tell her how to follow after her dead friend.

We knock ourselves against the hard facts of life until we are so bruised that we cannot bear the tenderest human hands ; then God sends the memory of the dead or angel-hands to help us over the rough road before us. For the dead are ours : they never change.

Dr. Ross came in while Ruth was preparing dinner.

"Why, Ruth !" she said ; "how much better you look ! I am so glad, my child, for I was alarmed about you."

"I feel better," replied Ruth ; "I have been trying a new prescription. Guess what it was."

"Save time by telling me," returned the Doctor.

"You know politicians are demanding a change,"

said Ruth, laughingly ; “ I thought a change might be good for me. I took the very greatest one that I could think of : I have been to church.”

“ That was not only a great, but a good, change,” observed the Doctor. “ I tell you, Ruth, it does not do for us women to get into ruts ; we need some bright changes. It is astonishing how many nervous systems are ruined by an everlasting sameness. Where did you go ?”

“ You remember I told you of a minister who called on John Anderson when I was at Mrs. Jewell’s, do you not ? I went to hear him. He remembered me and spoke to me. He even knew my name. I never saw him but the once. He asked me if he might call and see me. And oh, Helen, he is coming here in the morning ! What shall I say when he comes ?”

“ I think you had better say, ‘ Good-morning. What a beautiful morning !’ That is the way most people begin conversation. Sometimes one has to say, ‘ What wretched weather !’ ”

Ruth laughed and said,

“ I will remember your suggestions. But you know what I mean. I don’t know how to talk to a minister.”

"I did not know that ministers required a method of treatment different from other people. I presume he will be able to understand any subject you may mention. Talk to him as you would to Mr. Phelps."

"I hope you will be at home when he calls," said Ruth.

"So do I," replied the Doctor. "I have met him in some of my professional calls; I assure you he is not at all terrible."

Dr. Ross was at home when Ruth's caller came; he did not talk religion at them. Ruth saw before her a very agreeable gentleman, remarkable only for his whole-souled Western cordiality. He manifested a great deal of interest in their work; indeed, he assured them that theirs was the only calling higher than his own.

"You can help both soul and body," he said; "I don't have that privilege. When we stop to think that God made man in his own image, it is a great thing to understand this wonderful human body. Yes, I quite envy you practitioners of the healing art."

"I think," said Dr. Ross, "if we oftener thought of that—realized that God honored our bodies in

fashioning them and meant them to be beautiful and healthy—we might take more pains to keep them so.”

“Yes, God meant us to be comely and healthy,” said the minister; “yet he honors sickness too. You remember he said, ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.’ Sometimes he calls one to ‘lay down his life for his friend’ in that hardest of all ways—by wearing it out in slow suffering.”

“Do you think it is a person’s duty to work for others to the extent of injuring his own health?” asked Ruth.

“In some cases it is not,” he replied, thoughtfully; “but if it never were, patriotism would be folly and the lives of our firemen one long piece of foolhardiness.”

Then Ruth, being drawn into this kind of talk, at length surprised herself by telling the pastor how troubled she was about work. She found him all attention and interest. He was sure she would have work soon. He would speak to his wife and some of the other ladies of his church; perhaps some of them could help her secure a place as nurse. He said,

“In this Western country we all help one another ; I should like to ask a favor of you.”

“What is it ?” Ruth asked, quickly. “I should like to do something for you if I might.”

“There is a woman on Thirteenth street who is neighbor unto you in that she needs your help and care. I saw her yesterday, after church, and I know to a certainty that her baby would be the better for a good bath and some womanly care. These are very worthy people, but, like many others in this country, they have had bad luck. I buried the woman’s mother on Saturday afternoon, so the poor soul has a double load. If you can spend two hours there this afternoon, you will do her great good and me a great favor. Tell her that you are my friend, and that I sent you to her.”

Ruth promised to do her best for the mother and baby who were neighbors to her in the broad sense of the word. She was more hopeful ; there was less of bitterness in her heart, and she had some faith in manhood, after all.

That wily fisher of men knew this young nurse must be caught by getting her to work for him, not by hinting that she needed help herself ; she would rather dress a dozen babies than have the

minister know how troubled she was. But he did know, for he knew the lives of working-girls in cities. He remembered the hunted look on Ruth Irving's face as she entered the church the morning before; now he knew she was out of work, and he understood it all. "She shall have work within a week, or what good is my church to the tempted?" he thought as he walked along the street.

Now, that church is a well-organized, carefully-disciplined detective force, intelligence-office and life-saving service all combined. Its pastor ran up some broad steps, rang a door-bell and was admitted to an elegant home; five minutes later the forces of the church were at work to secure a place for that young nurse.

CHAPTER XVI.

RUTH'S STORY.

"Where 'home' was a vague and empty word,

A child grew up—

Where oath and blow were the only law

* * * * *

Round the haunts that disgrace our Christian land."

WEDNESDAY morning came, and still no work, but Ruth was very hopeful. She had tried the surest way of curing a heartache—constant activity. Twice she had been to see the mother and the baby who were her neighbors; by so doing she had made their bodies comfortable and their hearts very glad. She had observed that there were other people in the city more troubled than she. Her natural cheerfulness was coming back. She cooked dainty meals on bright tin "buckets," as Westerners say; she kept the two rooms spotless. Still, she could not prevent an occasional spasm of bitterness and a deep longing to fight all the powers that be.

After all, there are no sadder funerals than the private obsequies which we mentally hold over those who have died to our respect. If Ruth could have stood by and heard the solemn-voiced "Earth to earth" spoken over her lover, her trial had not been so bitter. She could have wept then, and the world might have known that she had a right to grieve; kind friends would have come with white flowers and gentle words. She might have wrapped herself in black garments if she had wished, and the world would have respected her grief. Now she could not share her Dead-Sea apples with her nearest and dearest friend.

Dr. Ross was out; Ruth opened the wide window and let in a flood of bright sunshine. She went about her work just as of old, only there were no snatches of song on her lip. She dropped her dusting-cloth and answered the postman's ring; there was a letter for her, and Ruth seldom had letters. Surely this one meant work. The letter was postmarked Omaha and her name was feebly scrawled, as though the scribe's energies were all gone before that letter needed to be written. Yes; that letter was surely from some one who needed nursing up.

Ruth eagerly tore open the letter, but her eyes grew large and horrified, her cheeks bloodless, as she read; she looked as though the blight of years had suddenly fallen on her young face. She picked up her duster and went on with her work; she arranged a pile of *Medical Records*, even stopping to turn some of them that only the neat bindings might show. When she had finished her work, she drew pen and paper toward her and wrote quickly:

“10.30 A. M.

“DEAR HELEN:”

Then she stopped and hid her face in her hands. They had lived more like sisters since that fateful evening when Ruth had made two promises, one of them being that she would be a sister to Helen Ross, and now Helen Ross was her nearest friend. The girl repeated Helen's name over and over to herself as we sometimes moan out the names of our dead; then with nervous fingers she began again:

“10.30 A. M.

“DEAR HELEN: I have been called away suddenly. I cannot tell you any more now. I do

not know when I shall be at home again. With
much love, RUTH."

Then Ruth put on her hat and cloak and went hastily from the house, as if she were afraid that Helen might come before she got safely away.

That day, at dusk, a closely-veiled girlish figure crept out of a house in the lower part of the city ; white-souled women shunned that house with scarlet curtains. The veiled woman hurried along and turned a corner, as if she wished to lose herself in the crowd or to escape a load of grief or of guilt. She heard quick, ringing, manly footsteps ; some one overtook her, and a stern voice said,

"Miss Irving, what are you doing in this part of the city at this hour, and alone? You need not try to hide your identity ; I should know your figure among a thousand women. I saw which house you came out of as I walked up the street."

"Your voice says that unless I explain my business there I shall have no more to do with your sister. Mr. Phelps, is that your meaning?"

The girl's voice was defiant ; she expected reproaches. Mr. Phelps answered only by an em-

phatic silence. When they reached the street-lamp, Ruth stopped and threw back her veil; her face expressed courage and endurance:

"I will tell you why I went there, but perhaps you may not believe me; perhaps it will not help me in your opinion. Mr. Phelps, I have just come from the protection of my father's roof."

The words were full of scorn.

"I thought you were an orphan?" he said, slowly. "I am sure you told me so."

"I told you that I had no parents; perhaps you will agree that I am worse than fatherless? I have not spoken to him before in nine years; to-day I was obliged to ask his aid. Not for myself, for I would die rather than touch one penny of his ill-gotten gains."

There was a look on the girl's face that made her companion think of the muddy river and of how it would tell no tales. He drew her hand within his arm and moved on, saying slowly,

"Ruth Irving, do you think me a good brother? You helped me save my sister's life. Do you not think I know how you worked for her as if she were your own? I vowed then that you should have one solid friend as long as I should live.

Can you not trust me as Eva does? Tell me all your trouble. Let me go with you; let me protect you. Come, Ruth; play that I am *your* big brother too. Tell me all about it."

Leaning on Mr. Phelps's arm, Ruth told her humiliating story. It was hard to tell that story to a man whose life had never touched on the lower misery of the world, but she did tell it, and Herbert Phelps felt his respect for this girl rise with every word. He began to understand something of her almost morbid pride in a good name.

Home was near; Ruth ceased speaking as they reached the door. Her last word was almost a sob. Mr. Phelps drew her closer to him as they went up the stairs; taking both her hands in his, he said gently,

"We must act quickly. Tell Dr. Ross what you have told me; if she is out, I will call another doctor and the city missionary. I will come for you in an hour. Be sure to eat some supper; better drink a cup of hot milk. Do not go out again until I come."

The light in the window over the door told that Dr. Ross was at home. Mr. Phelps ran down the stairs and went hurriedly along the street.

Dr. Ross had returned soon after Ruth went out that morning; she read the girl's note and felt glad that there was a prospect of work. Then this medical-woman repeated the words "Dear Helen" to herself; she looked at them as though they were new to her. No one had written them, meaning her, since her mother's hand had penned them; for she was strangely alone. Her letters began formally addressed to "Dr. Ross." A title is desirable, but a household name is a comfort.

Dr. Ross began a gay song as she moved about the room. She passed into the bedroom, and said to herself,

"Ruth took nothing with her; she will not be gone long."

As night drew near Helen made the room look bright for Ruth's coming; she arranged the table in a tasteful manner, placing on it the sweet winter flowers which Mrs. Jewell had brought that day. Supper was nearly ready when she heard Ruth's step in the hall; the girl entered the room and came close to the stove before she began to take off her cloak.

"Welcome home, Ruth!" said the Doctor as she placed the teapot on the stove. "Where have you

been, to get that ghastly look?" she cried as Ruth turned her face toward the light.

"I have come 'back from the mouth of hell,' like the 'noble Six Hundred,'" said Ruth, wearily.

"What do you mean?" The Doctor paused with Ruth's cloak in her hands.

"I mean just what I say," Ruth went on, in the same dreary way. "You have expressed some curiosity as to my past life; now I will tell you the whole wretched story." She pressed her hand to her forehead, as if making an effort to think.

"Wait a moment, child; drink this tea before you begin. This is almost all milk, and will give you strength," said the Doctor as she brought forward the cup.

Ruth drank the tea, and then began her story. She spoke like one whose senses were numbed past suffering:

"My mother died when I was two years old; it was a happy thing for her, for they tell me she was good and pure. My father is a bad man, and he spends his life in making others as vile as himself. I had one sister, four years older than myself; father kept us girls with him in that dreadful place. Such

a life as we led ! I hate the name of that city ; I can't think of it without a shudder. Oh how I hated it all ! My sister was married while she was yet a child—only fourteen. Her husband was a man just a few degrees better than my father, for he married her, poor thing ! About that time the authorities found me. They compelled father to give me up, though I think he did it gladly, for he was tired of me. I have an awful temper, and oh how I hated him ! Mrs. Irving took me to bring up. I begged for a new name, for I hated everything connected with my childhood. No one had ever taken the trouble to christen me, and Mrs. Irving let me choose my own name. I named myself 'Ruth,' and they made 'Irving' legally my name. I tried to grow up to a pure and useful womanhood.

“ This morning I received a letter from my sister ; she begged me to come to her. I found her in one of those wretched huts on the Bottom ; she is dying of consumption and starvation. She is deserted by her wretch of a husband ; I think he placed her there that her disease might work the quicker. She lacks even the cheapest decencies of life. She begged me to go to father's place and try and learn something

of her husband, for she loves him even though he has been a curse to her.

“I knew that man—it will kill me to call him ‘father’ any more—I knew he lived here, for I have seen him on the street. I knew, or thought, that he would not dare to interfere with me, for I know too much of his past life, and he knows my temper. I had no money to help my sister with, so I went to father’s place and begged him to do his duty by the woman who was his child. I received only sneers and insulting words. Oh, I was wild with shame when I left his doorway. Mr. Phelps saw me as I came out, and, closely veiled though I was, he knew me. He made me tell him this whole miserable story. He is coming back here to go with me to my sister, whom I left with a wretched neighbor of hers. Helen, she is my sister; I must go to her, though I would go to any sick and suffering woman. Will you go with me? She can hardly live through the night.”

Ruth had risen and was walking up and down the length of the room; Helen put her arm around the girl and walked beside her. When the story ended with such a pitiful appeal for her help, she answered:

“Of course I will go with you. But why did you not come to me at first? Yet I will not scold you. You are my own darling sister, and we will help our sister who is sick. Sit down, Ruth; you must control yourself.”

The Doctor began to make hurried preparations for the night's work that perhaps might be awaiting her.

Ruth trembled like one in an ague-chill. Remember all she had endured during the last week. Family pride was strong in her heart; the knowledge that she had no family of which to be proud gave her a morbid desire to hide all knowledge of herself from the world. The memory of her miserable childhood was a constant thorn in her heart; she had been obliged to show the wretched past to these people whose friendship she so prized. She expected only indignation and scorn; instead, they both had called her “sister” and had given strong arms for her support. Both had spoken tenderly of the wretched woman to whom she must take them.

The Doctor placed on the stove a cup of milk, and when it was heated held it to Ruth's lips, saying,

"Drink this now, Ruth; then you must eat something."

"I can't eat, for oh, my sister has been starved to death!" wailed poor Ruth.

"Yes, you must eat," said the Doctor. "You must not fail us now; your sister needs you."

"I will not fail while poor Bessie lives," said Ruth; and she took the cup from the Doctor's hand.

The Doctor placed her medicine-case in readiness. Ruth pointed to the bed, and the Doctor, understanding the motion, took off a blanket and Ruth's pillow and made them into a bundle.

Both were ready when Mr. Phelps called; he hurried them into a waiting carriage. After a few low words with Ruth he climbed to a seat beside the driver. They were on their way at once to *our* sister.

Ruth looked up at the quiet stars. She wondered if there were a God above them; if so, she wondered if her sister knew him. This sister had held all her childhood's love. She wished she knew the God the Christians talked about; she wished she could repeat for her sister the tender words spoken for John Anderson. Oh, if she could kneel in

that floorless hut on the Bottom and promise her sister one of those "many mansions"! Surely they both needed a "Let not your heart be troubled." But Ruth Irving had never believed in these things. She felt as if both she and her sister were floating, floating, floating—

Where?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN.

“The grandest words that men have heard
Since ere the world began
Are, ‘the fatherhood of God,’
And ‘the brotherhood of man.’
Too long the night of ignorance
Has brooded o’er the mind,
Too long the love of wealth and power,
And not the love of kind;
Now let the blessed truth be flashed
To earth’s remotest span
Of the fatherhood of God
And the brotherhood of man.”

WHEN you crossed the railroad-bridge which spans the Missouri River between Council Bluffs and Omaha, did you, looking from the car window, notice the broad stretch of bottom-land along the river? Did you think how sometimes the muddy waters are muddier still, and, rising, spread their yellow tide over all this low-lying bottom-land? Because of this overflowing, the

bottom-lands are left to lie waste, while a city has been built on the bluffs to the west. The city's garbage-wagons have been emptied on those bottom-lands; thousands of old tin cans have been carted thither; so the river-bottom is not a lovely place. Rent is cheap there, however; so sometimes, when

“unmerciful disaster

Followed fast, and followed faster,”

wretched dwellings have been built, and there God's creatures stay until fate relents or death comes.

Oh, these dwellings of the lowest poor! The description of them is not pleasant reading, but by and by a new book will be published; in it will be a history of all the failures, of all the wretchedness, of this world; of all man's “inhumanity to man;” of all man's inhumanity to woman. Shocking much of it will be, but all the critics will be speechless then, for over against these sad and sickening records will be written a terrible “Ye did it not” for some whom this world counts very fortunate. I will not picture the scene in that hut on the Bottom; homes like that one may be found in all parts of our land: our *neighbors* dwell in them.

The stern state-messenger had come, but he was slow in demanding his prey. He had come for a woman of twenty-three years. For nine years she had been a wife, and in that time, after watching over them, weeping over them, had rejoiced that five puny babes went early to their graves, and so escaped such a life as hers. This woman had been so busy and so heartsick over her wretched lot that she had had no time to look after an entrance into one of those "many mansions." Deserted by her husband, disowned by her father, she had only one young sister to whom she could look for help, and the world would call her a disgrace to Ruth Irving.

Unknown to Ruth, the sister had watched her since they were parted, years before. Sometimes they had met, and the sister had satisfied her hungry heart with one glimpse of Ruth's bright face and had gone her way; for the girl had not recognized her sister-features in the faded, haggard face which the years of misery had brought to the woman. But death would soon atone for all, and the woman's heart was hungry for her childhood's darling.

Dr. Ross gently raised the sufferer's head, and under it Ruth placed the pillow. They spread over

her the blanket and held to her lips a stimulant; she swallowed feebly and whispered,

“Little sister, can’t you tell me something of the future? Am I just going out in the dark? Where are my babies—my little sick babies?”

Ruth had no help for her sister. Dr. Ross began repeating the promises given for lamps along the dark pathway, but they fell on unheeding ears. The neighbor-woman went back to her own cares. Herbert Phelps entered the room, and looked on pityingly.

“Doctor, can’t she be moved—taken to the hospital, or somewhere?” he asked.

“There is no time,” said the Doctor, sadly, as she went on with her work.

“‘No time’!” whispered the dying woman. “Must I go so soon?—Can’t you help me, little sister?”

“Oh, Bessie, I cannot help myself,” said Ruth; for she must be honest with the dying.

“A minister came here once,” the woman whispered, “but I would not listen to him. He had a kind face, but I can’t think what he said. Oh, is there nothing for me?”

Mr. Phelps came forward:

“Would you like to see a minister now?”

“Could he tell me what is ahead?”

“Yes; he can tell you all about it.” Then, turning to Dr. Ross, Mr. Phelps said, “It is prayer-meeting night. I think the man outside can reach the church by the time the meeting is out.”

“Tell him to hurry,” replied the Doctor. Her fingers were on her patient’s pulse.

The carriage was sent after the minister to speak words of comfort and help, for the demands of the dying are imperative, whether they come from palace or from hovel.

John Anderson’s pastor soon stood by that dying woman; he told the story of the “place called Calvary.” It is wonderful in how few words that story can be made plain. For the dying all theology is narrowed down to “For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

It was a strange group. There were the man of God, the stirring business-man, the womanly doctor, the skeptic nurse and the woman slowly dying. “Our Father”? Yes. He is a Father to all his creatures. There was but one tie of kindred



"Ye did it unto Me."

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blood in the group, but the nobler tie of human brotherhood kept all together until the soul of one had gone to the Father of all.

Gently the preacher repeated the old, old story, and Dr. Ross worked faithfully to help keep in its frail tenement the fluttering life a few precious moments longer.

“‘They shall hunger no more: neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat,’” repeated the preacher, “‘and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.’”

Ruth Irving began to know that God has comfort for all sorrowing, penitent ones. She clenched her hands in agony; great drops of sweat stood on her temples. To present sorrow was added the accumulated bitterness of years. In her helplessness she groaned, “O my God!”

The human soul *must* have some support outside of itself; the fact of this need is proof that somewhere there is the power to supply the thing needed. Since mankind has had a history, shipwrecked, hungry, despairing and dying mankind has in every language voiced its need in the words “O my

God !” for so have they named the motive-power of the universe.

The morning stars twinkled down on the sleeping city and the frozen river-bottom. The dying woman opened her eyes and looked straight up through the miserable roof over her head. The “bright white light” swept over her face; she stretched out her feeble hands and cried joyfully, “Oh, my babies !” and her soul was with the God who gave it.

Ruth watched while Dr. Ross closed the dulled eyes and composed the shrunken limbs. The features settling into the calm of death wore the look of the girlhood of which the weary one had been so cruelly robbed. Then Ruth Irving fainted away. Without an effort to restore her to consciousness, Herbert Phelps lifted her into his arms and carried her out to the waiting carriage; then he kept guard over the dead while he watched the others ride away across the river-bottom. He paced to and fro in front of the hut; he looked up at the countless stars and wondered if his parents and his friend watched his vigil. He was a man who had developed slowly. His life had been full

of healthy, hard work. Since the death of his parents no sorrow had come to him until John Anderson died, but now, for the third time in three months, he had watched the struggle with death. First had come the mighty fear of losing Eva; then followed the loss of his best friend, and that death had been the beginning of a strong friendship between Herbert Phelps and Ruth Irving. He lifted his hat as he passed and repassed the hovel which angels had entered. He was just beginning to learn of what metal he was made. For the sake of this newly-adopted sister the nobility of his soul came out grandly. The frozen river-bottom, the dead woman in the hut, the solemn stars overhead,—all were teaching him of the power of the tie of human brotherhood. Thereafter all human suffering would be human suffering to him, whether or not it touched his own heart's treasures. Herbert Phelps was a nobler, better man for having thus come bravely to the help of those who were in trouble.

The "chinook" wind was springing up, and the light snow began to melt. It was time for the March rise of the river, and soon the bottom-land would be covered with water. That still body

must be moved at once. There was much more work to be done that night.

The fresh, warm wind and the motion of the carriage roused Ruth's dulled senses. Ruth opened her eyes, but closed them again, moaning in the depths of her trouble. More than half unconscious, she rested on the cushions until the carriage stopped. The strong Swedish driver took her in his arms and followed Dr. Ross up the stairs and into the fire-lighted room, where he placed his burden on the bed. When the lamp was burning the driver said brokenly,

"She vas too leetle a child to be workin' for dem no-goods on dee Bottom."

"Is there anything we can do for you now?" asked the minister as he placed the Doctor's medicine-case on the table.

"No, I thank you," the Doctor answered; "I think I can care for her, now that I have her at home. You have been very kind already; I thank you very much for your kindness."

"'I serve,'" he quoted, with a smile. "I will leave you now, but I will come again to-morrow—I should say, later in this day," he added as he looked at his watch.

"I vill take the priest home now ; den I must find the man what help wiv dee died. I do something for you to-morrow ;" and the big-hearted Swede betook himself to his duties.

After a kind "Good-night" this minister who was so ready with help for every one went away to his own home and to the joy or the sorrow that might be in it.

Hours later Herbert Phelps knocked softly at Dr. Ross's door, and Helen opened it. She stepped into the hall and carefully closed the door behind her.

"She is asleep now," said the Doctor ; "an opiate did it, but it was necessary. I am very anxious about her."

"So am I," replied Mr. Phelps. "Poor brave little girl ! How many burdens she bore so laughingly !"

"I am just beginning to appreciate her," said the Doctor.

"I shall never cease to be thankful that I came up Tenth street as I did last night ;" and Herbert Phelps took out his handkerchief and muttered something about "a cold." "Some way, the look in her eyes made me think of the river."

"I am afraid that would have been her way

out," said the Doctor. "With her beliefs and her unbeliefs, I am surprised that she has endured so much."

"She sha'n't want for a friend to fight for her while I am above ground. I told her that I would be a brother to her, and I meant what I said." Then Mr. Phelps changed the subject: "The remains are at the undertaker's rooms. The poor woman shall have a decent funeral; it will be to-morrow morning. Will you go over with us? Mrs. Jewell will stay with Ruth if she is not strong enough to go out. Now is there anything that I can do for you?"

Ruth slept far into the day.

"I think she has escaped brain fever," said the Doctor when the minister called.

The kindly man wondered at the look on Ruth's face—wondered as he thought of the despair in her face when she had entered his church the Sunday before, and at the eagerness with which she listened to the sermon. He thought of the manly man who, dying, had placed this girl in his care. Do the dying have prophetic vision? He accepted his dead friend's trust. He knew there was much of

this which he did not understand—much that never would be explained to him ; but he covenanted with his God that he and the forces of his church should do all in their power to shield this young, beautiful, free-thinking nurse.

Whatever the minister thought as to Ruth's relation to the dead woman, he wisely held his peace on the subject. He sat by the troubled girl and spoke of the tender Father care over all, and of how God sometimes loves and pities us most tenderly even when his ways seem hardest. He spoke of the great love-pardon even at the eleventh hour, and of how the light of heaven seemed shining on the quiet face. Ruth listened, while her face had the look of impassive clay. The next morning Ruth was still unable to leave her bed, and Mrs. Jewell came and sat by her and scolded her gently for over-doing.

One carriage followed a plain hearse upon the way to the cemetery, and Ruth's three faithful friends stood by while the worn-out body was laid to rest beside that of John Anderson.

"Why, Mr. Phelps, this is your lot, is it not?" asked the minister as they turned away from the grave.

“Yes,” said Herbert, “and there is John’s last earth-dwelling. This is my family-lot, for I believe in the ‘fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.’”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEXT THING.

“When the song’s gone out of your life, you can’t start another while it’s a-ringing in your ears; but it’s best to have a bit of silence, and out of that maybe a psalm’ll come by and by.”

LIFE to Ruth was one great interrogation-point. She had not ceased to be surprised at the readiness with which her friends came to her help after they knew her history and her present trouble. She did not recognize the nobility of the fight she had made for a life far removed from stain. Helen Ross made her understand something of her friends’ regard for this brave striving, but Ruth felt deadened to praise or to blame. Her sister was dead, but her father would always be a plague-spot in her life. She dreaded to go out lest she should meet him on the street. Ruth Irving could not say “My father” with that tender pride with which Helen Ross spoke of her father and the childhood’s home in Rock

Island. Then, what was this life? Was it only a glimmer of light between two clouds, one of which rested on the bluffs held sacred as a burial-place, or was it the dawning of endlessness, sad or glad?

Faith and hope and cheer seemed withered within Ruth Irving's soul. She thought there was no use in trying any more. She could not see that, exhausted as she was by nervous excitement, watching, grief and the wrath which had scorched her soul, she was in no condition to attack questions which baffle the strongest minds. She rose from her bed and went listlessly about the two rooms. She told herself there was no use in trying any more. She had tried to go out from her old ways of thinking and to adopt others of which she knew nothing. She had heard many vague and often misguiding remarks about faith and resignation. She thought she must make herself feel satisfied, and perhaps bright and happy. But she could not do it. She would have seen the folly of trying to cure a bodily ailment in the manner in which she treated her aching heart.

Several days went by, and Ruth appeared as though the burden of living were too great for her strength. Dr. Ross became alarmed anew. Her-

bert Phelps called often, and Eva spent every spare moment with her friend. One night she called on her way home from school. In her hand she carried a great bundle of examination-papers, which she brandished in the air as she cried gayly,

“Ruth Irving, thank your guiding star that you are not a teacher! Look at these papers; every one of them must be read and marked before I sleep. Some of this philosophy is new and startling; some of my pupils exercise their originality in the matter of spelling only, while their natural history would make Professor Agassiz shudder even in his grave. I have a mind to make you help me with these papers.”

Eva threw off her hat and began sorting papers; soon she had Ruth at work. Dr. Ross came home and was pressed into service; so the teacher's work was swiftly lightened.

“I ought to require you to go and see some of my patients in return for all this labor,” said the Doctor, laughingly.

“I should be delighted to go,” replied Eva. “I will prescribe exercise, air, bathing, for every one regardless of the nature of their ailment.”

“And ruin my business,” the Doctor exclaimed.

"No, indeed! If that is to be your method of treatment, they all would very soon be beyond my reach."

"I don't care about your other patients, but I shall take Ruth home with me," said Eva; "Mrs. Jewell charged me not to appear without her. I promise to have her well very soon. Don't you dare to say one word against it, because she is going."

"It would do her good.—Do you feel strong enough to go, Ruthie?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes; Ruthie feels strong enough," said Eva. "I learned how to manage sick people when I was under her jurisdiction. I am so glad over the help I have had with those examination-papers that I think I shall have a picnic, so to speak, this evening.—Will the night-air hurt Ruth?" she asked as she and Ruth put on their cloaks.

"Indeed, the night-air will not hurt her," answered the Doctor. "The night-air is the very best kind of air we have at this time of day; it was made for us to breathe."

Left alone again, Helen Ross, M. D., went cheerily about her two rooms. She hoped that this change would benefit Ruth very much. She

told herself that the healthful atmosphere of Mrs. Jewell's boarding-house was just what was needed to restore the girl's morbid fancies to their proper tone.

After supper this medical-woman took down a book on nervous diseases and planned a long evening's study. Between her eyes and the page came the vision of a manly face with earnest blue eyes. She thought what a good friend Ruth had in Herbert Phelps. She tried to study, and found herself thinking of a poem which Mr. Phelps had read to them the day before. It was on the brotherhood of man, and reminded her of Mr. Phelps's words as they turned away from Ruth's sister's grave: "This is my family-lot, for I believe in the 'fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.'"

Something like a schoolgirl blush came over the Doctor's face as she, sitting alone, thought of the way Herbert had said "my family." She wished she knew that poem. She wondered who wrote it; it seemed to be a cutting from a newspaper. Mr. Phelps had taken it from his pocket. Why did he not offer it to her? At least, he might let her copy it. She would ask him for it. No; she

would not. He might have known she would like it. She would not say one word about it.

On the whole, this medical-woman's line of thought was quite like a schoolgirl's. She devoted her mind to her book for five minutes ; then she wondered what they were doing at the boarding-house. Yes ; she certainly was very anxious about Ruth Irving. Then she decided that Herbert Phelps had missed his calling : he should have been a doctor. It was so vexing to see a natural medicine-man devote his energies to selling soft coal !

Ruth needed rousing, but neither Dr. Ross nor Eva Phelps guessed the relief the poor girl felt in leaving the rooms in which so much of trial had come to her in so short a time. She spent the evening alone with Eva.

The next day Mrs. Jewell's society made Ruth feel still more deeply the loss in her own motherless girlhood.

Mr. Phelps reached home before dinner-time. He found Ruth seated in a snug corner of the dining-room ; she wanted to be near Mrs. Jewell. Ruth said she was playing invalid. She held a

book in her hands, but Herbert assured her that the book had been neglected, and ventured the opinion that she did not know the heading of the first chapter. He expressed some sympathy for the neglected author; then he possessed himself of the book and said gayly,

"Say, sister, how would you like a ride this afternoon? I have some collecting to do, and should be glad of your company. The air is glorious.—Mrs. Jewell, don't you think a drive would put some color into this girl's white cheeks?"

"I do," said Mrs. Jewell as she came forward with a glass of tender celery in her hand. "Mr. Phelps, how is it that you are so early to-day?"

"Things were a trifle dull in the office, so I got out half an hour in advance of time. I wanted to get ahead of Charlie. I fancy great minds think alike for once, and I have the best right to Ruth, for she has promised to be my sister. Oh, I don't propose to be left desolate when Eva goes off with that Denver chap. It will not hurt Charlie to remain behind for once. Help keep him humble, perhaps."

"You are very selfish," said Ruth, with a little laugh.

"Of course I am ; all is fair in love, war and this Western country."

Then Mr. Phelps stopped and whistled at the bird ; after which, he continued :

"That laugh of yours is worth ten times more than all the stings of conscience my selfishness will cause me."

"Your conscience !" Ruth exclaimed. "Why, only last week you told me that your conscience was away on a vacation."

"It was," said Mr. Phelps, gravely, "but it has returned, and is much invigorated. I hear Charlie's gentle footsteps. I wonder where the rest of the people are? It is time for the exercises to begin."

"Those people coming up California street look like my children," said Mrs. Jewell as she went to the window and while watching picked a dry leaf from a large scarlet geranium. "They have a wonderful faculty of overtaking one another. It reminds me of the way we children used to go in troops."

The "people" entered the dining-room glowing with health and exercise ; every one had a pleasant greeting for Ruth. When all were seated at the

table, Charlie Hills spoke up in his impetuous manner :

“Oh, Miss Irving, it is a proper day for a ride. Will you go out with me this afternoon?”

“I have promised the afternoon to Mr. Phelps,” Ruth answered; “otherwise, I would go with pleasure.”

“And that is why he rushed off before office-hours were over?” said Charlie, dolefully. “I knew something would happen.”

“How do you know when I left the office?” Herbert asked as he paused with the sugar-spoon halfway to his coffee-cup.

“My son, it is my business to know everything,” said Charlie; “that little item was right in my line.—But, Miss Irving, the signs of the times are that to-morrow will be even more glorious than to-day. Will you go with me to-morrow morning?”

“I promise that she shall go,” said Mrs. Jewell.

“Then Charlie is not so far behind, after all,” said that worthy.—“Phelps, I think I have heard you argue in favor of the delights of anticipation. Miss Irving and I will enjoy our ride doubly.”

“‘A bird in the hand—’ You know the rest,”

laughed Herbert Phelps. "To-day is lovely, but we may have a forty-horse-power blizzard by to-morrow."

"Mr. Phelps is at the gate," said Mrs. Jewell early in the afternoon.

Ruth was soon seated in the carriage. They waved Mrs. Jewell a farewell, and the spirited horse sprang off as if glad to show the life which bounded through his veins. They had driven only a few blocks when Ruth suddenly clutched her companion's arm. He looked at her in surprise, but her white lips only said,

"That man !"

A middle-aged man was walking toward them. His face showed marks of dissipation ; his chief characteristic was wicked cunning. The expression on his features as he looked at Ruth inspired Herbert Phelps with a desire to jump from the carriage and knock him down.

The man put out his hand and caught the horse by the bit ; the animal stopped instantly. Herbert Phelps gathered the reins firmly in his right hand and deliberately placed his left arm around Ruth, who by that time was thoroughly frightened.

Neither of the men spoke, but each gave the other a whole broadside of hate in a look. A policeman accompanied by a mild-looking gentleman in citizen's garb came up at that moment.

"What does this mean?" asked he of the blue coat.

"I don't know," said Mr. Phelps. "This fellow stopped my horse; now I am waiting for him to state his business."

The mild gentleman had already slipped a bright bracelet on the wrist still raised to the horse's bit; the bracelet's mate was locked around the detective's arm.

"I trust you will excuse him," said the detective; "our business is quite urgent."

"Who sent you after me?" cried the man as he turned on his captor.

"Keep quiet, or you are a dead man. It don't take much sending where such fellows as you are concerned. You are to take a little trip back East; you are wanted for some of your devilment. It is my opinion it will be some time before you come back here to raise trouble in your favorite fashion. Begging the lady's pardon, but we take our coons while they are treed."

Then Ruth noticed what her companion saw at the start: the policeman's pistol was ready for use.

"Poor little girl!" said Mr. Phelps as they drove on. "I am sorry our ride has had such an unpleasant beginning."

"I am glad I know of his arrest," said Ruth; "I shall feel safer now. I have been terribly afraid of him since that night. There is something in your Bible about honoring one's parents, but I cannot honor him."

"It is his own fault, not yours or my Bible's," said Herbert Phelps. "No one wants you to go around honoring such an old sinner as he is. There is also something in the Bible about a father's duty to his child; that man has proved unworthy of his child's respect. I should think people would look at this side of the question a little oftener. The Bible does not instruct you to honor him; he is your worst enemy, and the enemy of every right-thinking man, woman and child in this city. If he wished to reform and you could help him, the case would be very different; but for the present don't reproach yourself because you can't honor him. Now, Ruthie, for your friends' sake try to think no more of him. Let us cheer you up and

make you happy. The future is all before you, and something in it may be full compensation for all you have suffered. Let us change the subject. See that flock of brants. Did I ever tell you how I went hunting last spring? No? Well, it was this way. When I was a boy, I used to fool with a gun, and liked the sport; so, of course, I made one of a goose-hunting party last spring. My gun was a stranger, and first impressions were very unpleasant. I got a sight at a flock of brants and blazed away. It was too much blazing; that gun was worse than a broncho. Like Sancho, I was a man who had been grievously kicked. Both barrels went off at once. I had a black eye and the brants had a fright. Hills started the story that I was shooting at a flock on the wing and made such havoc that as they fell one struck me on the head. I endured no end of chaffing from the boys. I think Mrs. Jewell almost pitied me. Now I say with Bryant,

‘Vainly the fowler’s eyes

Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong.’

Duck-hunting is not my mission; it is too uncertain. I would rather go fishing. Just notice that cottage

on the corner ; I had some experience there about a month ago. I was out collecting. After I rang that bell I heard a great commotion in the hall ; they seemed to have lots of trouble. After a while the window by the door was raised, and a woman put her head out. She looked me over, and decided that I was not an agent. She said, ‘ Will you please wait ? The baby has lost the door-key ; I will find it soon.’ I waited. The day was warm, and I sat down on the step and meditated while I timed the search. It was seventeen minutes and twenty-three seconds before that key was found. You should have seen that woman’s face when she learned my business.”

So Herbert talked on, not seeming to expect any replies, until Ruth began to take an interest in the objects they were passing. They were well out from the city, having driven over the bluffs, past the location of the old State capitol, and then on toward the north-west.

“ How desolate it all looks !” said Ruth, pointing to the blackened bluffs in the distance. She was still in a mood to see all the dreariness of the scene, and to feel that it was in harmony with her life. Not so the man beside her :

“No, Ruth, not desolate, but dark. We are not Sadducees; we know there will be a resurrection. In a few weeks we will see brilliant green beauty instead of ashes. Over there is the city of the dead. Do you see that young cottonwood on the bluff? I have stood under its branches twice this winter. We may look for beautiful life from the ashes which cover the burnt prairie; surely we may look for still richer beauty from the dear dust we left under that cottonwood, and gladness from the hardest things of this life. We must wait and trust.”

That night Ruth lay resting on the couch while the boarders were in their rooms preparing for supper. Charlie Hills was singing:

“‘Sure, it’s a short story
I’m bound to relate;
If you pay close attention,
I won’t make you wait.’”

Ruth was disgusted; she wondered if that man ever did have a sober, sensible idea in his head. She decided that the man who always tries to be funny is the most tiresome of all tiresome people.

She half regretted that she was to ride with him the next day.

“‘My father he lived
In a place called Remote ;
He’d a cow and a pig
And a fine billy-goat.’”

The singer went on with his song ; a door closed with a bang, and in another minute the irrepressible Charlie was entering the supper-room.

In reply to some of Miss Quick’s remarks Mr. Fremont said,

“That reminds me of the last account of the excavations—”

“Fremont, I beg you, *don’t!*” Charlie Hills exclaimed. “Verily, all roads lead to Rome.—Miss Irving, did you know that Mr. Fremont has gone raving wild over excavations and things? In the morning he talks of Ilium ; at noon, of *Iliad* ; at night, of *Ilios*.”

“Hold on, Charlie ! I have not reached *Ilios* yet,” said Mr. Fremont.—“Miss Irving, you shall be the very first person to whom I lend that book, for I am going to buy it soon.”

“My father is completely gone on that book,”

said Charlie. "I put in all my spare time while at home reading *Ilios*."

"And you have been back here a whole week and have not told me one word about it!" exclaimed Eva Phelps.

"Hear that from a young lady who dubbed these explorations 'espionage'!" said Charlie. "I thought you professed to be a woman without curiosity? I have regarded you as a lovely nucleus for a dime museum."

"I think I shall redeem my credit for curiosity by ordering *Ilios* as soon as the time comes for me to draw my salary again," said Eva as she joined in the laugh.

"Good!" said Charlie; "and when you have finished reading that, read *Ramona* and Mr. Harsha's *Ploughed Under*."

"Yes," said Herbert Phelps; "those books will bring your sympathies back to the present day and a vanishing people."

"There is Fremont," said Charlie; "he is at this moment living in prehistoric times. He is so busy with the Trojans that he forgets to nickel-plate the hand-organ man."

"Charlie, you see too much when you look,"

said Mr. Fremont; he was beginning to lose patience.

"Can't help it," Charlie returned, calmly. "But you come up to my room after supper, and I will consent to an interview; and the subject shall be *Ilios*."

CHAPTER XIX.

A BEAUTIFUL WORLD.

“Blessed the man whose life, how sad soe’er,
Hath felt the presence and still keeps the trace
Of one pure woman.”

THE next day was clear and bright. Life seemed to quiver in the bracing air.

At an early hour Charlie Hills and Ruth Irving were off for their ride. Herbert Phelps smiled as they passed his office. He was glad of the brightness of the day, glad that Ruth was going out for a ride, yet very glad that she had gone with him first. He felt that in some way Ruth belonged to him—that he had a first claim to her society. He wished he were a married man. If the ideal home and the ideal wife were his, he might invite Ruth Irving to the shelter of his own roof, where the ideal wife would cheer and nurse the heartbroken girl until she became the happy, energetic Ruth of old. A mist gathered in his eyes as he thought

of Ruth's troubles. That mist was the lens through which this stirring young business-man saw his office changed to a cozy room where, on either side of the hearth, were seated his sister by birth and his sister by manly adoption. Just in front he fancied he saw his own chair placed, and beside it a face and a form. Some way, his fancy stopped short there; he felt that it would be almost sacrilege to try to fancy *that* face. What would that face be like when God sent it into his life? This was all during business-hours; Mr. Phelps kept up two trains of thought that morning.

Dr. Ross came down the street accompanied by a handsome stranger. Mr. Phelps lifted his hat and smiled cordially, but his mental comment was, "What in the world is she doing with that puppy?" Helen A. Ross, M. D., was a trial to him. He liked her well enough, but she was a doctor, and he did not approve of professional women. It was a great pity that she was a doctor, though he did not explain why medicine is a more unwomanly profession than teaching. Dr. Ross did well enough that dreadful night on the Bottom: no hand need be firmer, no one could have been more thoughtful; but it was a pity that she must endure such scenes.

He did not reflect that the nurse was a delicate woman, and so, alas ! was the sufferer.

Mr. Phelps watched this doctor as she moved along the street. She was an attractive woman tastefully dressed, but the medicine-satchel was not a shopping-bag ; worse still, the red edge of her prescription-book showed above the edge of her pocket. Two men were waiting to speak to Mr. Phelps, but he turned to catch one last glimpse of the Doctor, and gnawed his moustache savagely as he went about his duties. He made no more fancy-pictures that morning.

Meanwhile, Charlie Hills and Ruth Irving enjoyed their morning ride.

"Miss Irving, don't you think this is a beautiful world ?" asked Mr. Hills.

"Yours must have been a happy boyhood if you think the world so beautiful," was Ruth's reply.

"Mine was a happy boyhood, but boyhood slipped away, manhood and sorrow came, and still I think the world beautiful."

"You speak like an aged man," said Ruth. "I fancied you and boyhood had not fully parted company."

"I hope we never shall," he said, smilingly.

"But I have voted at three Presidential elections; that ought to make me seem venerable."

"A problem," she laughed. "Three times four are twelve; plus twenty-one— Is it possible that you are thirty-three years old?"

"My mother's Bible makes it thirty-four. I felt every day of it when I was at home and a ten-year-old called me 'papa.'"

"Called you 'papa'?"

"Yes. I thought you knew that I have a child?"

"I begin to think that I don't know anything about you," said Ruth, slowly.

Mr. Hills reined his horse down to a walk and studied the whip-socket while he said,

"I don't speak of her very often. Not because I do not think of her, but thoughts of her are too deep for words when I am so far away from her. You would say that the brown bluffs make a sad picture; to me they seem warm and glad when I think of the snowdrift which covered my wife's grave when I saw it two weeks ago. Winter lingers longer there than here, and a cold blanket covers her yet."

"How long ago—" Then Ruth stopped; she

had never before heard Charlie Hills mention wife or child. "You don't like to speak of this?"

"Sometimes I do. I will tell you our story, if you would like to hear it. We played together when children; we were lovers all our lives. We were married when she was sixteen and I was twenty-one. We were too young to marry, but I did not know it then. For three years we were as happy as any one ever is this side of heaven; then she went up higher, and left a little girl to comfort me. My wife's mother wanted to keep the baby, and, feeling that I had taken her only child from her, I gave her our baby. At first I thought I was heartbroken. I came out here, and have tried to make a man of myself just as though she had lived. I must work for my daughter's sake. Would you like to see her?"

Charlie drew the reins over his arm and took from his pocket a dainty leather case. It contained two cabinet photographs; one represented a fair girl-woman, the other a laughing, sunny-haired child of ten.

Tears came to Ruth's eyes as she looked on those two strange faces. There was something very touching in the history of this fun-loving friend.

Mr. Hills placed the case in his pocket, and, gathering up the reins, went on with his story :

“ I have learned many bitter lessons during the ten years in which I have tried to live without her. At first I tried to cure my grief ; I have gotten over that. Now I am content to wear it to my grave, thanking God that he gave the grief and loneliness to me instead of to her ; for my darling was happy while she lived. I think that is the way with true love. Nothing is so hard as the knowledge that our dear ones suffer. Don't get the idea that I am unhappy. I was desperate, wild and wicked at first, but I learned to bear it. Not because I must, as you would say ; there is none of that kind of endurance in me. I should shoot myself if I tried it. See here ! I know that I shall run against some of your pet theories. She believed in religion and in eternity ; I know past all doubting that her soul did not go out in the dark. ‘ She is my angel who was my bride,’ and I never forget for a moment that her spirit is with me. I sent a message to her when John Anderson went out to the other world. Long before this they have met and talked of the baby and me and how I have been faithful to the love of my boyhood. The Jesus she trusted gives

me a lift when things get dark. You see, she is fixing up one of those 'many mansions' while waiting for me. She used to plan how she would like to fix up our home; now she can gratify her taste. Some day God will let her lean down and call me; then— But I am in no hurry to go; every day I ask God that he will let me stay in this world until my daughter is grown to womanhood and able to take care of herself."

Here was something which Ruth had never had—a true father's love.

Mr. Hills was saying,

"I don't like to think of the trials of homeless girls. I want to give my child a practical training; her education must make her self-helpful. I want her to be able to earn a living at some work not quite murderous. Now, Miss Irving, when you hear the rattle-headed remarks of 'that Charlie,' as Fremont says, don't say, 'Still waters run deepest.' That old saw may be true in the main, but the whirlpool rapids are not shallow. Much of the laughter in the world is only the sound of some fellow being dashed against hard facts. There is such a thing as brave laughter, but it is sadder than tears. Don't judge people by the amount of fun they make.

I think some of my saddest moments are spent in fixing up our funny column."

"You are peculiar in that you grieve so long," said Ruth. "Most men outlive a grief of that kind in less than ten years."

"Perhaps," he said, while his eyes followed the flight of a flock of brants. "At home they asked me if I intended to marry again. She taught me a high respect for womanhood ; I will not ask another woman to be my wife while my heart still longs for the bride of my youth. I have hungered for her face every day for ten years. Fremont pesters me constantly. He thinks he wants to room with me ; he can't understand why I refuse. Not one man in a hundred can feel another's troubles as a true woman will. I could not endure his constant presence ; I must have her, or no one. Nobody shall drive my angel-wife from my room. She never minded my racket. Hear that meadow-lark ! Listen, now. I can whistle as well as he ;" and Charlie Hills made the air ring with a whistle wonderfully like the "meadow-lark's one refrain."

The surface ahead was broken by bluffs and draws with fertile divides between. Farmers were ploughing up the rich brown earth or raking corn-

stalks into great piles which burned with the swift-rushing flame characteristic of prairie-fires.

“ You see, my life has not been all boyish, though you have considered me very boyish,” said Charlie. “ I told you a little while ago that I know my wife lives again in a more peaceful world, but you will say that I cannot prove it. You cannot prove that those blackened bluffs will ever be covered with blooming green again, but you know they will. ’Way back in the infancy of our race a Voice promised that seedtime and harvest should not fail ; later, from the same authority, came the words, ‘ I am the resurrection and the life,’ and I believe those words. They say a woman learns to trust much more easily than does a man ; it must be so, for it took me years to learn that simple lesson. I think my trouble was that I tried to learn it too rapidly. I thought I must make myself submissive ; I have learned better. It has to be done a little at a time. Go watch them work on water-color portraits, and you will understand what I mean. The print is dim at first. The artist goes to work ; for hours he does nothing but stipple. After a while the complexion is clear, the cheeks are rounded, the lines are distinct ; you can almost see human flesh in the

picture. So it is that I am stippling away on my faith in things. My business is against me ; I must necessarily see much of the worst side of life, and it is hard to remember that beauty springs from mud. There is something to admire even in the most dreary picture ; there is something of God, and there is possible glory, in the most wicked heart."

These words were much like those Ruth had heard the day before, yet they were very different. Charlie Hills had lived too deeply to go about giving advice to troubled souls. Ruth wondered if he knew her story ; she felt certain that much of it was down in his note-book. Jessie Fleming said that newspaper-men were supposed to know everything ; here was a newspaper-man who had a talent for finding out things. Ruth was studying the science of bearing trouble ; she was sure the story had been told to help her. Here was another man whose love had brought him pain, but who held the pain as precious because it was a part of that love. Ruth would be just ; she would judge fairly : there *are* honorable men in the world. She would pick up her life and go on, hoping and working for the best ; she would live down the doubts she could not kill. Charlie knew his wife's

soul was immortal ; Herbert Phelps was sure about these things, so were Mrs. Jewell and Dr. Ross, and millions of other people. Then there was John Anderson ; she must keep her soul pure, for she had one friend in a world more beautiful than this.

CHAPTER XX.

CLIMBING THE BLUFF.

“We rise by things that are under our feet—
By what we have mastered of good or gain,
By the pride deposed and the passion slain,
And the vanquished ills that we hourly meet.”

RUTH went to her room; she seated herself in a rocker by the window. She would think it all over. She had shed no tears since she locked Roy Ford out of her life. She thought of him; she hoped she might never see him again. She longed for a faith like that of Charlie Hills. Could she ever say of any loved one, “I know past all doubting”?

The thought of the hidden sorrows of the world brought tears to the girl's eyes. The young wife in that snow-covered grave, the motherless daughter in the Eastern home, were for ever present in the mind of that newspaper-man. The sadness was all

hidden ; the world saw a smiling face. Then Ruth thought of her own deep trouble. The old hatred for her father was gone ; Ruth wished she might help him to be a man of honor and truth. She wondered on what charge he had been arrested.

The hoarse whistle of the Union Pacific shop sounded for noon, and still Ruth's eyes were wet with tears. She rose and bathed her face. She brushed out her long brown hair, then bound it in glossy coils about her pretty head. The hairdressing was scarcely over before Dr. Ross and Eva Phelps entered the room. Their cheeks were glowing with health and from the fanning of the strong Western wind.

"My girl is quite herself again," said the Doctor as she stood before Ruth and studied her face.

"Of course she is," said Eva as she began sticking invisible hairpins into her blond frizzes. "I believe you gave her too much scientific scrutiny."

"Ruth knows we doctors are only human beings," returned Dr. Ross as she moved to the bookcase and took down a book. "We don't think of nerves and tissues all the time. There is your dinner-bell ; I must go.—Ruth, when are you coming home?"

"She is not going home for a long time yet," said Eva. "Can't you stay and take dinner with us, Doctor?"

"I must not, to-day, I thank you;" and the medical-woman passed into the sunlight, while Eva and Ruth turned toward the dining-room.

"I thought Dr. Ross was up stairs," said Mrs. Jewell. "Where is she?"

"She stands by the gate talking with Charlie Hills," said Eva. "I asked her to stay to dinner, but I think she needs coaxing."

"You go and tell her that I say she must come back to dinner, I shall feel hurt if she does not," said Mrs. Jewell.

Eva went to the door and called,

"Oh, Doctor!" After the manner of Westerners, she put all her emphasis on the "Oh" and the first syllable of the word "Doctor," letting her voice fall away as though her breath were gone.

The people by the gate looked up, and Eva continued:

"By the authority of Mrs. Jewell, I charge Mr. Hills to escort Miss Ross to our dinner-table."

"I shall be happy to obey the powers that be," said Mr. Hills.—"Miss Ross, will you accept my arm

in the spirit in which it is given and allow me to tote that pill-bag?"

The two moved gayly up the walk; Herbert Phelps came round the corner just in time to see them enter the house. He muttered something about "that insufferable bore." He meant Charlie Hills. Mr. Phelps kept up that unchristian train of thought all through the dinner-hour, for Mr. Hills devoted himself to that "tiresome medical-woman."

Herbert Phelps was very busy that day. He had "adopted" this criminal's daughter; he felt there was much in the man's life which needed his attention. Perhaps he must protect Ruth from him. To his honor be it said that his loyalty to Ruth did not falter during that miserable afternoon. Before night he began to appreciate Charlie Hills, who seemed to know just how to learn all there was to learn on the subject. They succeeded in keeping Ruth's name from the papers. The quick-coming Western night had settled down before they turned their backs on those dreary details.

"I don't wonder that Ruth seems crushed," said Charlie as the two men walked homeward.

"Poor child!" said Herbert; "I don't understand how she can be the girl she is, after the train-

ing that old brute gave her. They say blood tells, but—”

“Don’t quarrel with the law of heredity,” said Charlie. “I fancy that Ruth’s mother was a noble woman, and that she is her mother’s daughter. The girl inherited her heroic desire to be useful in the world, and also her disgust for her father. It is a good thing that she does not go by his name. She sha’n’t want for a solid friend while I am above ground.”

“I would fight for her as I would for Eva,” said Herbert, eagerly. “Do you know what has become of that young Ford, who hung around Ruth so much last winter?”

“He has gone off to Laramie, and I am glad of it,” said Charlie. “He was of no account. I would break his head if he dared to look at my daughter.”

That evening Herbert told Ruth some of the particulars of the crime with which her father had been charged :

“There seems to be no ground for defence even if any one wanted to defend him. Besides that, there are half a dozen other charges against him.

He will probably go up for twenty years, which to a man of his age might as well be a life-sentence. I will watch his trial ; and if there is anything that you need to know, I will tell you. Otherwise, shall we drop the subject? But first promise me that you will not go off trying to bear any more troubles alone. Sometimes I think you don't half trust me even now. I wonder what is the reason?"

Herbert seemed anxious to help Ruth and honestly afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing, and Ruth remembered that night on the river-bottom.

"Yes, Herbert, I do trust you," the girl cried, impulsively. "I wish I could tell you how much I thank you for all you have done for me."

"I don't want thanks ; I want your promise to come to me any and every time that I can help you. Will you not promise me that, Ruthie?"

"Yes, I promise ;" and Ruth, having professed faith in Herbert Phelps, began to have faith in him.

Better than that, Ruth began to have faith in herself ; it seemed as if she really were climbing the flowery bluff of trust. But the grocer's bill lay like lead upon her spirits. She did not include that in her promise to Herbert Phelps ; she could

not tell him about that. She was afraid he would go around and pay it if she did, and she could not have him paying her debts.

Dr. Ross called next day, and with her a gentleman who was in search of a nurse for his invalid daughter.

"We will make it very easy for you, Miss Irving," he said. "No night-work shall be asked of you until you are perfectly strong again. My pastor recommended you so very highly that I feel anxious to have you with my daughter. I think you must let me send my carriage for you this afternoon."

Ruth promised to be ready, and then went back to her rooms to prepare for duty. Waiting her there was another edition of that grocer's bill, and with it a note which made her cheeks burn with rage. How glad she was that work had come at last! How glad she was that the impudent Dane need not know where she was until she had earned enough money to pay the bill! Anew she resolved that she never would get into debt again. She almost shouted for joy when she received her wages for the first week's work. It was enough to pay

the bill, which she feared more and more as the days went on. She resolved to send the money by some one, and assured herself that it would be a long time before she entered that store again. She told Mrs. Jewell the whole story.

“Ruthie, I will do this for you on one condition,” said Mrs. Jewell: “you must promise me that you never will do such a thing again. If you are in need, tell Dr. Ross or come to me, but you must never get trusted at a store—last of all, at one kept by a foreigner.”

Ruth gave the required promise, and Mrs. Jewell went around to pay the bill that very day.

“I know not of it,” said the Swedish youth in attendance; “the doubtful accounts are kept at the other store.”

“You have a telephone; ask for this bill,” said Mrs. Jewell.

“You had better go round to the other store and see it;” and the manly clerk sampled a fresh box of raisins as he spoke.

“The goods were bought at this store, and the bill should be here. I shall pay for them here. When will your employer be in?”

Under the inspiration of that question the young

Swede went to the telephone. After a great amount of helloing, the attention of the other house was directed toward Miss Irving's bill. This was an enterprising firm ; it divided its forces and managed two stores at the same time that it might secure a greater range of custom. It also made one book-keeper do the work for both houses.

The clerk was just polite enough to do his telephoning in his native tongue, but his remarks did not escape Mrs. Jewell's ears. Long experience with kitchen-girls had taught her more than one language ; she understood even that one-sided conversation. She was glad that bill was paid. She was fond of Ruth Irving ; she felt very jealous of the dangers which beset the girl's way. She kept herself young in heart that she might sympathize with the young ; she made her home attractive that she might win the confidence of all these young people and help pilot them around life's breakers. In so doing she fought her country's battles and gained many victories of peace.

Ruth went back to her patient feeling younger and brighter than she had felt before in weeks. True, she was still in debt to Dr. Ross and she must repay the money which Herbert Phelps had

spent on her sister's funeral, but she had work and hope. She had an added touch of self-respect, for she was once more very useful in the world. She enjoyed the bright spring sunshine and the budding cottonwoods with brown birds twittering from their branches. The glossy coats of Omaha's black-birds gleamed from every gatepost and lawn.

The house in which Ruth's duty lay was filled with all that could make it homelike save a mother's love and care; that had gone out years before, and now the only child was swiftly following. And oh, that child, with all her pain and the sunset flush on her cheeks, was her father's idol. He prayed that he might be spared the loneliness her empty rooms would bring. All his wealth, his culture and the highest medical skill could only smooth her path a very little. Her room seemed more like a place to rest in than a field where death was fighting inch by inch for the vantage-ground.

We all remember rooms where brave souls keep playing that health is coming back and go on brightly planning, knowing all the while that this world holds for them nothing but a few feet of broken green sod.

"I must send you out more frequently," said Beulah Andrus after Ruth had returned from Mrs. Jewell's; "you bring a brighter smile back to me. Do you know that your face has a strong fascination for me? There is such an earnest way about you—such a wistful light in your eyes. It almost makes my heart ache. Oh, Miss Irving, do not feel hurt at my plain speaking; I do not mean unkindness. It is because I love you so much that I like to watch you. But I think I love you a little more with that beautiful flush on your face. I wish you would talk to me about yourself."

"What shall I say?"

"Tell me what makes you look so earnest?" said Beulah.

Ruth was moving softly about the room, doing those little things which make the difference between good care and very poor care for a sick person. She answered slowly:

"I am climbing a bluff."

"Yes; I partly understand. The bluff is—"

"Trouble," said Ruth, without looking up.

"Are you near the top?" Beulah asked; and Ruth answered,

"I think not."

"I see," said Beulah; "you have a Hill Difficulty as well as I."

There was a light tapping at the door, and Mr. Andrus entered the room; so Ruth need not reply.

Wealth was not all that made that home so beautiful, for it was a Christian home. The girl so surely slipping away from it all felt only bodily weakness. A bright, strong mind shone through the dark eyes. Her memory was very busy. Talking was the only amusement left to her; her greatest pleasure was in describing the bright places in her life. She said it was a comfort to have some one who was obliged to listen to her, so she told funny stories of college-life, recited sweet poems or made bits of history into stories. In all she opened the doors of a world which Ruth Irving never had entered. And the girl knew it; she told her father that she was teaching Ruth by lectures, and Ruth had reason to be for ever grateful for those lectures.

The spring days went by, and summer was on the plains. All the while Ruth was growing necessary to that family. The duties of a daughter of the house frequently fell to her lot. Her voice grew lower, her laugh softer and less frequent perhaps. There was a touch of tenderness in all she said and

did which is never found in a very happy life. The old questions troubled her. She kept on telling herself that some time, somewhere, she too would be satisfied—would feel that she knew just as John Anderson had known. Remember her past life. She had no fragments of truth learned on Sunday afternoons in childhood; she never sat beside her father and listened to a children's sermon too old for her years. And then—the loss of the motherless—she never had gone to sleep to the music of low hymn-singing. The triumph on John Anderson's dying face was her first Christian evidence. She thought Beulah Andrus could not understand such doubts as hers. Sometimes she was tempted to ask Beulah's pastor to tell her why he knew those things were so, but she never did. She told herself bitterly that she cared for no more experience in love-matters. She resolved to devote all her energies to relieving human pain, so she decided on a medical education. She had some time for reading, and she was careful to read only such books as cultured people praised. She had learned to do the next thing. Single-handed and alone she would earn an expensive education, but she gave her whole mind to *Snowbound* when Mr. Andrus read it to his

daughter. She re-read it all. Some of the lines sang themselves over and over in her mind :

“Where'er her troubled pathway be,
The Lord's sweet pity with her go!
The outward, wayward life we see;
The hidden springs we may not know,
Nor is it given us to discern
What threads the fatal sisters spun,
Through what ancestral years has run
The sorrow with that woman born;
What forged her cruel chain of moods;
What set her feet in solitudes,
And held the love within her mute;
What mingled madness in the blood,
A lifelong discord and annoy,
Waters of tears and oil of joy,
And hid within the folded bud
Perversity of flower and fruit.
It is not ours to separate
The tangled skein of will and fate,
To show what metes and bounds should stand
Upon the soul's debatable land,
And between choice and circumstance
Divide the circle of events;
But He who knows our frame is just,
Merciful and compassionate
And full of sweet assurances,
And hope of all the language is
That he remembereth we are dust.”

And the words sounded in her mind even in sleep. She read the Bible to Beulah, but it did not help her, for she had been taught that the Book was a fraud. How should she learn that it is not?

Ruth saw little of Dr. Ross, and less of the people at the boarding-house. She knew she could rely on those people. She thought how Herbert Phelps's advice would help her, and how she would study with Dr. Ross. As yet she had no time even to tell them her plans; so she planned all the more. She would prove that she was worthy of her friendship. Some day they would be proud of her. How easy it is for an unselfish soul to work for "their sake"!

CHAPTER XXI.

AN OLD BOOK.

"There is but one Book."—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

LITTLE by little Beulah Andrus learned of Ruth Irving's struggles in life; little by little she began to understand the mind-hunger and how the brave girl's life was hedged in.

An unsatisfied ambition in Beulah's own life made her very thoughtful for her young nurse. Lying there and looking up at the sky-tinted ceiling, she made many plans, but her plans were all of how her work might be done by other strength than her own. During the long nights when her pain was too great for sleep the sick girl would ask that her bed might be rolled near to the great window, so that the moon might be company for her. Then she would send her father away and bid Ruth to lie quiet on her couch. Through the long hours Beulah Andrus looked into the faces of the near-

seeming Western stars and planned to give Ruth Irving the future she coveted for herself.

Beulah hid all the planning and the pain it gave her ; she shut her teeth hard against the sobs that would come, and said,

“‘All is of God that is and is to be,
And God is good.’”

It might have been a little victory, but in the book that is kept up yonder it will look as large as any one exploit of the general who studied the stars over St. Helena.

Beulah Andrus had a nervous, sensitive temperament ; the sensitiveness was brightened by disease. There are days when the clear air of Nebraska is highly charged with electricity. Every breath was torture to the sick girl. There came a day in August when the sun shone with a brilliancy blinding to human eyes ; even the wind had lost its freshness and seemed like the hot breath of some monster. Every living thing wilted. Ruth spent the day in trying to bring comfort and coolness to her patient. In the afternoon she sat by the bed. One of Ruth's firm, strong hands clasped the two thin ones ; the other gently waved the fan. She

was trying by strength of nerves and will to bring sleep and calmness where there seemed little prospect of either. There was a low mutter of thunder, then a loud crash, seemingly just over their heads. The slight form on the bed writhed in agony. Ruth brought out a hypodermic syringe and a little white powder.

"Don't give me that," wailed poor Beulah; "it's against my principles to take morphia."

"I know it," Ruth replied. "I hate the stuff as much as you could wish me to, but it is against my principles and your physician's orders to let you wear yourself out with needless suffering. I am going to send you off to Shut-eye Town. When you return, this world will be much improved."

The nurse pushed back the dainty sleeve and administered the medicine. Soon the convulsive movements ceased, and Beulah was asleep.

Ruth straightened up and took a deep breath. Oh how tired she was! She went to the window and looked out. Rain and hailstones were pouring down in fierce slanting sheets. The thunder growled and rumbled just over her head, the cottonwoods bent before the fearful blast. The very fierceness of the storm rested her. She stood watching until

the lightning stopped its wild play and the thunder rumbled away in the distance. The storm settled into a steady down-pouring rain ; then Ruth looked about her. The sleeper was breathing softly. "She will sleep some time yet," Ruth thought as she softly left the room. She went down to the great library. She wanted more knowledge of the God who "doth scare the world with tempests."

There was much Christian literature before Ruth. She looked at the big volumes and wondered which to choose. She wished that theology had been cut finer and placed on lower shelves, where the hurried might reach it. Lying just before her was a little book—so little that it might be slipped into the smallest boy's pocket. She took up the book, wondering what subject could be set forth in so small a volume. It was *Christian Evidences*, that little-big book—so little that the publishers charge only ten cents for it, so big that the author has made it hold the biggest subject in all the world. There was a leaf turned down, and, following the instinct which makes us read a marked passage, Ruth read Coleridge's words: "I know the Bible is inspired, because it finds me at a greater depth of my being than any other book."

Ruth was thoughtful. If the Bible had not thus found her, it was because she had not given it a chance; she had been below everything else. She carried the little book back to her sleeping patient; she began reading eagerly. Even the preface helped her, and some of it surely meant her:

“But there are struggling souls who long for light. They wonder if the claims of the Bible are true. They ask the question honestly. In this little volume are a few of the reasons which satisfy the Christian thinker concerning the claims of the Bible. They are told plainly and simply and briefly, and the author prays that the telling may help some souls into light.

“J. H. VINCENT.”

That is the way the preface ends. This was what Ruth had looked for. That good man had prayed for the unknown ones who should read his little book, and she would read it. She began to read. The author said,

“Before me lies a book. It is a book of books, a library in itself, collected through sixteen hundred years. It is an old book, its earliest volumes written before the earliest known books of antiquity.

Its friends—for this book has both friends and foes—call it the Book of books.”

So Ruth read on, sometimes pausing thoughtfully before a passage of special interest to her :

“The firm faith and rich rhetoric of its friends are not enough to satisfy all men that this accepted and lauded book is really divine. PROOFS ARE NEEDED. The ignorant need them, the prejudiced, the skeptical, the tempted—the first for illumination, the second for correction, the third for conviction and the fourth for confirmation. Error is in the world. Sin strengthens error.”

Ruth read on eagerly, but paused before the words,

“Thus thousands and tens of thousands in this world accept the Bible because of the testimony of mother, father, friend, minister or church. They have no doubt. The Bible is their home and the pulpit is to them the word of God. They need no logic, no proof, no book on evidence, to give them a start toward the heaven which the Bible points out. And this process is not to be despised. There are evidences in abundance that the Bible is God’s word ; but if a soul can find the consolation and strength of that word without treading the path of

doubt and of demonstration, he is to be congratulated. Faith and heart go hand in hand. One has said, 'Yes, I do believe in the Bible—in part, at least—because my mother did. And it is dearer because it was *her* Bible, and my God is more revered because he was my mother's God, and Christ is loved because he was my mother's Saviour, and heaven is more precious because the heaven of the Bible is my mother's heaven.'"

Ruth Irving wondered if her mother believed in that God and went to his heaven. Then she read on. There was so much that interested her :

" 'A more relentless criticism by far has been applied to the New Testament than was applied by Wolff to the *Iliad* or by Niebuhr to the history of Rome.'

"BARNES.

"How diligent the Jews were in the preservation of their sacred books has often been noticed. Every word, every letter, was sacred. Copyists preserved them with the utmost reverence, counting every letter of every book. No word or letter—not even a *yohd*—was allowed to be written from memory. Besides, the copying of these records was regarded as a sacred engagement. The copyist was required,

before beginning his work, to bathe his whole body in water. He was required to array himself in full Jewish costume. He was not permitted to write the name of God with a pen which had been used before ; and should a king address him while writing that name, he must take no notice of him. Painful and superstitious as most of these regulations were, they must have been of immense value in securing accuracy in the text. The scribe must have felt an almost awful responsibility in transcribing words that had such solemn sanction."

Ruth read on and on :

"The Bible touches the world, and we find that all its allusions are sustained by facts. The more we know of the customs of ancient nations, the more we learn of the geography of the countries referred to, the more relics and ruins we exhume, the more of the old languages of Assyria and Babylonia and Egypt we interpret,—the more do we find that the incidental allusions of the Bible to these things are exactly true. Tyre, Babylon, Nineveh, Egypt, Palestine, Jerusalem, Moab, the Jews,—all these, and many besides, stand as present, permanent, tangible, visible monuments to the truth of the Bible.

“The force of this argument is increased by the reflection that we are living in an age of exhaustive research, discovery, original thought and merciless criticism. Old ruins are coming into the sunlight, old customs are being investigated. Philological studies receive marked attention. There was never before such an age of probing and challenging and testing. Ecclesiastical terrorism has almost disappeared. Antagonism to Christianity is free, open and untrammelled. The enemies have been at work among the rocks, the ruins, the protoplasms and the stars, but all the discovered facts harmonize with the Book. All the results of scientific research for the last twenty-five years, where they at all bear upon the Bible, corroborate its statements, assist in its exegesis and add new charm to its teaching. The Bible, speaking thus accurately about the things we already know and about things we are from day to day finding out, may be depended upon when it speaks of the eternal and divine.

“Tested as no other book ever has been tested, opposed as no other book ever has been opposed, scrutinized by friends and by foes, subjected to the most exhaustive criticism of this most critical age, tested by natural science, by philosophy, by religious

and historical critics the most learned and acute,—the Bible still stands on a firm and immovable foundation, believed in by scholars, by hosts of wise scientists, sought and trusted by the masses of plain people who are noted for common sense and practical wisdom.”

Ruth was getting sound information on the questions which had troubled her. She closely followed each step :

“How is it with the Bible in its testimony on matters just beyond our ken? It has been given to tell us something we did not know and could not find out. As a revelation of the hitherto unknown or as an authoritative revelation of the things thought of and desired by the wisest, but hesitatingly announced, does the Bible meet our highest thought and contain a system in harmony with its lofty claims? . . . It is a record of miracles, of God-like deeds which no man could perform, and which, being performed through man, prove his divine call and appointment as a teacher of truth.

“It is a record of the MOST MARVELOUS OF ALL MIRACLES, JESUS CHRIST. The very conception of the character of Jesus is a miracle. He is the

problem of the age. Never has he been studied as at the present time, and by men of the profoundest learning. He is the marvel of all literature, the ONE central figure of the book, for whom and by whom the book exists and without whom it had never been. Rousseau himself said, 'The conception of Christ by the authors of the Gospels would have been a greater miracle than any the Gospels ascribe to Christ.'"

The rain had cooled the air, and still the patient slept. Her thin white face was turned toward the light.

Ruth read on :

"The miracles of the Bible were brought to the test of the senses in a public manner. They were numerous and of great variety. The success in each case was instantaneous and complete. They underwent a rigid examination at the time, were published and appealed to after, and in the very places where, they occurred. None of the early Christians were induced to confess themselves deceived. There is nothing in the miracles but what is entirely worthy of the majesty, holiness, justice and goodness of God, by whose power they professed to be wrought."

Ruth was nearly through when she read :

“Remember that Christianity has been a leader in culture. Dr. Howard Crosby says,

“ ‘Who founded Prague, and Heidelberg, and Leipsic, and Tübingen, and Jena, and Halle, and Berlin, and Bonn? Who founded Salamanca, and Valladolid, and Oxford, and Cambridge, and Aberdeen? They were Bible-men. When the rest of mankind were caring for the mere necessities of the physical life, Bible-men were holding the torch of science, and these men were the predecessors of the Bacons and Newtons. Who founded the American colleges? With very few exceptions, they were Bible-men. Newton was only one of hundreds who, given to science, loved his Bible. From his day the succession has been complete. And the science that in our day boasts such Bible-men as its Faraday, its Forbes, its Carpenter, its Hitchcock, its Dana and its Torrey cannot be considered as occupying a position hostile to the Bible.’ ”

Ruth shut the little book, keeping her fingers between the leaves just at the close of that passage. She leaned back in her chair and looked out of the window. The softly-falling raindrops gave a mournful sound ; great piles of gray gloom shut out the

sky. She thought of the Christian evidences in the lives around her, and then she went on reading that fifty-fourth page :

“Remember the condition under which the Bible promises clear apprehensions of its truth.”

Ruth picked up Beulah's Bible and looked up the reference John vii. 17 : “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” That was certainly very reasonable.

Gleams of light shot through the falling rain-drops ; Ruth raised her eyes to behold a shower of diamonds. A bow of promise was “set in the clouds.” She caught its meaning for her, and the glory of the sunset shone on her face as her sleeping patient moved restlessly and then opened her eyes and cried,

“Oh, it's brighter now !”

“Yes, dear ; it's all bright now,” said Ruth as she bent over the sick girl ; but the invalid did not know that the words held a double meaning.

It may be that afternoon's reading would not have settled your doubts ; such might not have been your way, as it might not have been mine, but it was Ruth Irving's way. Dr. Vincent's prayer was

answered, for that grand big-little book helped Ruth's soul into light—even the light reflected by the Sun of righteousness—and there was another victory for the Prince of peace.

CHAPTER XXII.

VACATION.

"Across the broad brown peaceful hills,
With blossoms to our broncho's knees,
With singing-birds, by broken rills,
We rode through seas of drowsy bees."

"COME, Dr. Ross! Please say you will go,"
coaxed Jessie Fleming.

"But I don't know what Ruth will say," replied
the Doctor.

"Ruth will go if you will," Jessie declared, leaning back in her chair as though there were no more to be said on that part of the subject.

The Doctor hesitated :

"I know it would be very pleasant, but I am
afraid I can't spare the time."

Jessie sat straight up :

"Dr. Ross, have you taken one single minute's
vacation since you became an M. D.?"

"Not what you call a vacation, but I have not
worked all the time, by any means."

"All work and no play makes even doctors dull people," laughed Jessie.—"Eva Phelps, do you put away that book and come here and help me convert this medical-woman."

Eva laughed as she crossed the room and seated herself between the Doctor and Jessie:

"I will add the force of example to your arguments; that is the best I can do."

"Yes, that is all that can be desired," said Jessie. "I wish Ruth were here."

There was a quick step outside, a quick ring of the bell, and the door opened to admit Ruth Irving.

"Was Fate ever kinder?" cried Eva as the three young women crowded around the new-comer to welcome her.

"Ruthie, you are looking quite worn out," said the Doctor after the first greetings were over.

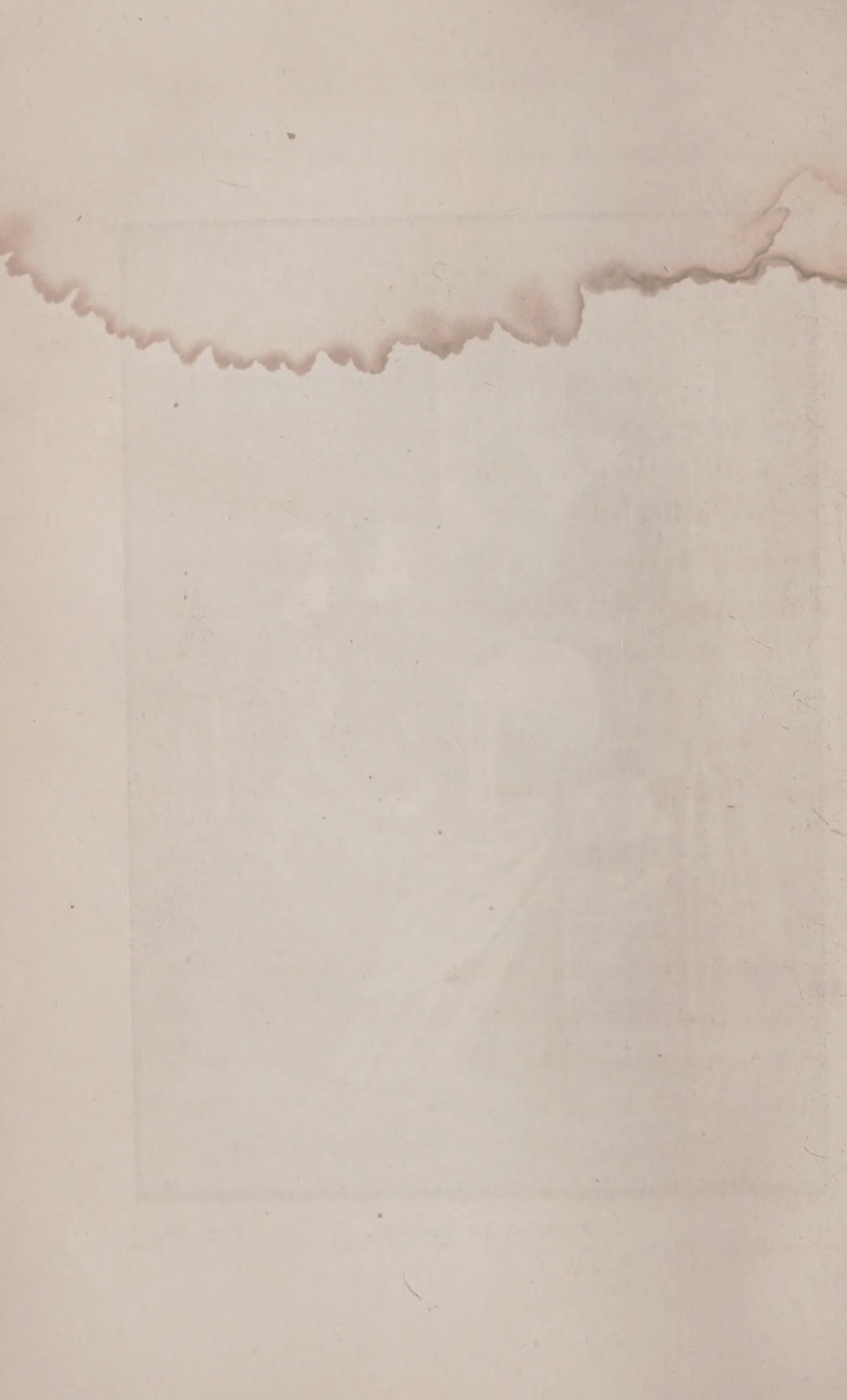
"I am very tired," Ruth replied. "My patient requires such constant care; she suffers severely all the time."

"Can't you rest a while?" asked the Doctor.

"Mr. Andrus advised me to do so," said Ruth. "His daughter may live some months yet. She wishes me with her at the last; they think that I



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should rest a while now, and then try to endure to the end."

"We have your rest all planned," cried Jessie. —"Come, Doctor! Say you will go."

"I had given no thought to vacation, for you know my spare thoughts are all with the horse I am going to buy very soon," said the Doctor; "but tell Ruth about your plan, and see what she says."

"We will all help you think of your horse; so there will be no time lost on that," replied Jessie, with a laugh.—"Ruth, you have heard me speak of my uncle Jay, have you not? He lives on a ranch in the western part of this State. Listen to this letter; it came this morning;" and Jessie began to read from the letter she carried in her hand:

"*"O Solitude, where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face?"*

"*"Solitude has no charms now, Jessie. Don't tell me that I know nothing of solitude: this ranch affords solitude of the deepest dye. I never shall advocate a "business education" for another woman; if you never had had that dreadful business education, I might have my little Sand-bur with me to-night.*

“ ‘Remember, my child, it is almost time for the visit you promised me. And remember, also, that a Western man’s latchstring never is pulled in. Bring some of your friends home with you—bring them *all*—and make things lively on this beastly ranch. I deserve some reward for the patience with which I have endured your absence; so, my little Sand-bur, invite that whole boarding-house to come home with you. You know, of course, that I mean the boarders, not the structure. Bring Dr. Ross and that little nurse too. Mrs. Jewell can chaperon the crowd. By the way, there is one person rightly named: she *is* a jewel.

“ ‘I am going to put camp-bedsteads in your room for the ladies, and it will do those city-fellows good to roll themselves up in blankets and sleep on the floor. We will show them how to ride a broncho and teach them how to talk like a cowboy. The whole party will be able to speak understandingly of ranch-life for evermore.

“ ‘Now, my darling, make out a strong case and let me know how many are coming, and don’t be long getting ready.’

“So much for that part of the epistle,” said Jessie as she folded the letter and put it in her pocket.

"Uncle Jay is my father's twin-brother ; he is the only relative I have in all the world. He is a bachelor, and owns the cattle on many a fertile hill ; his head-cowboy's wife keeps house for him. Uncle never has any low cowboyism about ; the 'family disturbance' is never used except as a medicine, and that very rarely."

"I don't understand about the 'family disturbance,'" said Dr. Ross.

Jessie laughed gayly :

"You know cowboy idioms are made up of American originality and the Spanish language. 'Family disturbance' is the cowboy's name for whisky. Sometimes it is known as the 'stuff that's manufactured,' but Uncle Jay says 'family disturbance' is the best name he knows for it. That is what uncle means when he says we will teach you to talk like a cowboy. A man who is new to ranch-life is designated as a 'tenderfoot,' a revolver is a '45,' and so on. There are all kinds of cowboys, from the worst of Texans to broken-down city ministers trying to regain their health. As a class they are daring, big-hearted fellows who have the greatest respect for womanhood. I have lived on a ranch more than half my life, and I am

prepared to defend the cowboy. I have invited all the people at the house ; part of them can go for a few days, but I want you three to go with me and stay as long as I do. The Doctor's title gives her lots of dignity, so she can chaperon the party. Oh, we'll have a good time. You people talk it over, and do decide to go."

Dr. Ross and Ruth had a long talk about the trip. Country-life was new to both, and ranch-life held all the charms of novelty. They said they could, and would, go home with Jessie Fleming.

Ruth went back to her work. Things seemed the same with her as before that afternoon's reading the week previous, yet all was very different. The feverish restlessness of her thinking-moods was gone. She was no longer a bit of isolated humanity, but a part of a grand plan, and the God of the universe had said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Yes, the heavenly Father was hers, and she almost loved that other father who had been a curse to her all her life. Now she prayed that he might not receive the wages of his sins.

Jessie Fleming went about all day, planning. She said to herself:

“Don’t I see through Uncle Jay’s invitation? That man is tired of living alone; he wants a helpmeet. He has taken a roundabout way to get one, but I will help all I can. Eva is engaged; I suppose the Doctor is wedded to her profession. There is that little nurse; she would be a lovely wife for Uncle Jay.—Jessie, my dear, I am afraid you will prove to be a matchmaker. You must be careful not to let the girls know that the ranch is a matrimonial market; they would not stir one step.—I wonder what has changed Ruth Irving so much? She used to be so full of life and nonsense, but now her face has all the calmness of a sister of mercy. She is wonderfully sweeter than she used to be. Yes, she is very lovable; she is just the wife for Uncle Jay.”

Jessie talked about the ranch all the time, and the entire party were very enthusiastic on the subject when Dr. Ross called that evening.

“When shall we go?” asked the Doctor.

“Next week,” Jessie answered.

“Don’t you think the child quite insists on my going?” said Mrs. Jewell as she entered the room.

“Of course she does!” cried the Doctor.

"But I had not thought of giving myself a vacation this summer," replied Mrs. Jewell as she slowly shook her head.

"I thought for you," said Jessie.—"Dr. Ross, I have taken the sense of the meeting, and, sad as it may seem, only Mrs. Jewell and Eva, Mr. Phelps and Charlie Hills, are available."

"Available for what?" asked the last-named gentleman as he put his head in at the doorway.

"Come in," said Jessie. "'Speak of angels, and—'"

"'You hear the rattle of his chain,'" Charlie finished as he took a seat on the piano-stool and whirled halfway round and back, facing the company.

"This is a preliminary meeting," cried Jessie, "and how can we have a preliminary with you gyrating in that manner? It is bad form. I said you were one of the available candidates for the ranch-party."

"Will the cowboys stand us up in a row and shoot off our hats?" asked Charlie, gravely. "I be hanged if I know how to behave on a rancho. Or is it a broncho that kicks?"

"You will certainly be hanged if you steal

ponies. There are some lovely strong cottonwoods on Uncle Jay's ranch," said Jessie, wickedly.

"Any rattlesnakes?" asked Charlie.

"Yes; I think so, at least. I was bitten by one when I was a child."

"Why, Jessie, is it safe to live there?" asked Mrs. Jewell.

"Certainly it is safe to live there, and I shall defend our cowboys against all aspersions. I never received truer politeness from any men in my life than from my uncle's cowboys. Most of them are true gentlemen at heart, in spite of their rough life."

"Don't give them too much credit for that," said Charlie. "Like Emerson, you are 'always environed by yourself,' and the man who would treat you other than politely would be foolhardy indeed. But what about the rattlesnakes?"

"You will need to obey the ranchman's commandments," was the reply.

"What are they?"

"One is, 'Thou shalt carry matches in thy pocket.'"

"And matches are made in heaven," said Charlie, solemnly.

"Whose?" asked Herbert Phelps as he entered the doorway just in time to catch the last sentence.

"Miss Jessie's," said Charlie.

"I am very glad to know it," she said, not in the least annoyed by Charlie's attempt at teasing.

"Come, Mrs. Jewell! Will you not promise?" Jessie coaxed, after much more talking on the subject.

"Most of the boarders will be gone by that time," said Mrs. Jewell, thoughtfully. "Mr. Fremont will stay in town all summer, but he can take his meals down town and sleep in the house."

"Of course he can!" chorused the company.

"I ought to be canning fruit," was the last excuse offered.

The woman who deliberates is lost, and soon Jessie said gleefully,

"I will write Uncle Jay that we four girls will be with him one week from to-morrow, and that three other people will join us later."

A brakeman turned a seat, so that the four young women might sit together; they settled down to enjoy a swift ride over the rolling prairies of Nebraska. The Union Pacific express-train climbed

the Summit, slid down the hill and swept across the divides and over the rivers.

Jessie Fleming sprang down the car steps, and immediately her face was hidden in the shaggy beard which adorned Uncle Jay's face.

"Oh, Sand-bur, how you stick ! Same old Sand-bur ! I was afraid some city-fellow would get my little Sand-bur."

"Instead, the Sand-bur has gotten you," laughed the happy girl as she clung to her uncle's left arm while she went through with the ceremony of introducing her friends to her guardian-uncle.

Dr. Ross listened to Mr. Jay's charming flow of Western adjectives and cowboy idioms, but she was forced to admit to herself that there were ranchman characteristics of which she had heard and read which were not illustrated by Jay Fleming.

Near the platform waited a large farm-wagon to which were attached four strong mules. The baggage was stowed in the bottom of the wagon-box, and the girls climbed to the high spring-seats. Jessie chose the front one and gathered the reins in her strongly-gloved hands.

To those girls whose horizon had long been sick-room and office-walls that twenty-five-mile ride was

a revelation. The world was carpeted by the wonderful buffalo-grass, yet on every hand were tall clumps of giant wild grasses, while the wild sunflowers glowed like gold in the sunshine. The far-away sky seemed to bend so near! The tireless prairie-wind had the exciting, strengthening effect of rich wine. Their hearts drank in the glory around them. Girlish tones and girlish laughter answered the meadowlark's whistle and the brown bird's piping on the divides. Doctor and teacher, nurse and stenographer, were in a fair way to grow brown as a squaw, and to forget that they had ever had any nerves.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE RANCH.

"'Tis a land so far that you wonder whether
E'en God would know it should you fall down dead.

* * * * *

O land of the beautiful sun and weather,
With green under foot and gold over head,
Where the sun takes flame, and you wonder whether
'Tis an isle of fire in his foamy bed !"

IN that wide land Jay Fleming had made a home for himself and for little Jessie when Nemesis, in the guise of Consumption, threatened him. One by one those Flemings had died—father, mother, brother and sister; only the twin-brothers were left of all their race.

The time came when Jesse clasped his failing arms around his little daughter and then gave her to her uncle Jay. The dying father asked that these two—the last of the Flemings—should not be separated until little Jessie should have grown to womanhood. Having that wee girl on his hands,

Jay Fleming found it necessary to make a comfortable home and to have much of civilization in it. A kind, motherly housekeeper looked after the little girl's bodily wants, while the uncle educated her after his own heart. He guarded her as his one rare pearl. Every cowboy on the ranch would have shed his last drop of blood in her defence. It was a wild, happy life, but Mr. Fleming conceived the idea of giving Jessie a business education. In a busy city she learned the stenographer's cunning; she also learned of the delights of the society of girls of her own age and of those of boys a little older. When her studies were over, she would not be coaxed back to the ranch; she insisted upon trying her education. Was it practical? Her uncle, in dismay, owned that it was. He satisfied his bachelor-heart with what of her society she chose to give him. He was much disgusted with the success of his plan, as many another man has been before him.

Perhaps this ranch differs from all other ranches; it certainly shows that its owner did not leave the comforts of civilization behind him when he betook himself to raising cattle. Lumber is costly on the prairies; the house alone showed no small degree

of wealth. The exterior was plain even to ugliness. It had a squatty appearance; it was a low oblong building. There the wind is always tugging at every projecting corner; the keensighted ranchman outwitted the wind by leaving only four very plain corners for the wind to tug at.

Once inside the house, its low, squatty appearance was forgotten. A wide hall extended the width of the building and was used as the family sitting-room. To the left were the dining-room and the kitchen, and there also was the housekeeper's room. To the right were the private apartments of uncle and niece.

Jessie had told her friends that there was not an inch of carpeting at the ranch. They were prepared for bare floors; to their delight, they found the wide hall covered with light matting, while rugs innumerable were scattered about. Buffalo, bear, antelope and coyote had given their garments for that purpose. There were many easy-chairs, many books—treasures in memory of foreign travel. Jessie said a baby was the only thing that was not, and never had been, in that hall.

The owner of it all regarded his visitors as more than angels. Four genuine American girls on his

ranch ! The like was not to be hoped for again in the history of one man's lifetime.

A little way from the house a stream wound itself among the hillocks, nearly losing itself in the sandy soil ; farther on it reached the river which formed the water-front of the ranch. The prairie-fires had for ages recoiled upon themselves as they reached the edge of the bluff, and left the low-lying banks unscorched. Willows shook their pale plumes and several cottonwoods stretched their long branches over the bed of the stream ; wild-plum trees fringed the banks. There was a wonderful growth of grasses in which one might lose the way, but there was safe covert for great broods of prairie-chickens and the quails that piped all day, while the meadowlark's clear whistle thrilled the air. Violets blossom there, and sweet wild roses ; in June the bluffs are blue with lupine-blossoms. Farther on the bluffs rise higher above the sandy bed of the stream and are honeycombed with wolf-holes. The prairie-wolves howl dismally in the night-time while they skulk in the grass-shadows.

Nature had made the spot wild and lovely ; but when it was decided that the girls were to visit the ranch, Art took this place in hand. Where the

shade was thickest the rank grass was cut and raked away. Trees were trimmed, a swing was put up, seats were constructed and strong hooks were fastened into the tree-trunks, from which hammocks were to be suspended. Then Gospel Ben the cowboy, more thoughtful than the others, had carefully gathered the sand-burs on both sides of the path leading to the ranch-house.

"What are you doin' that for?" asked a brother-cowboy as he folded his arms and leaned against a cottonwood.

"So they won't get burs in their white dresses," said Gospel Ben as he straightened up and kicked the burs together.

"How do you know they will wear white dresses?" continued the skeptic.

"Because they do;" and Gospel Ben gathered his arms full of sand-burs and carried them safe beyond the reach of white dresses.

The half dozen cowboys looking on knew that white dresses had been prominent in the history of Gospel Ben, the pride of the ranch.

It was then that the cowboys held their preliminary meeting. A committee was appointed and sent to the nearest commercial centre to look after their

interests ; so it was that the first detachment of cowboys who left their quarters near the corral to pay their respects to the ladies of the ranch presented a very fine appearance. Embroidered flannel shirts—ordered from Omaha for the occasion—gay silk neckties and new sombreros helped to make a toilet which satisfied the cowboy's heart. The best ponies the ranch afforded did credit to their horsemanship.

Never did a queen enjoy more sincere homage than those four young women received from those gayly-gotten-up cowboys. The herd grazing in the distance were guarded with a double guard, so that by no chance might they stampede in the direction of the willow-shaded stream where, true to Gospel Ben's prediction, white dresses brushed the wild grasses.

"Girls," said Eva as she swung in a hammock and watched the first sunset, "I promised to write a full description of this place for Herbert ; I can't do it.—Doctor, will you not help me?"

"Tell him your vocabulary has given out," replied the Doctor. "This place is like unto nothing else, and I can't describe it ; it is a 'picture which I shall ever go alone to view,' for all of being able to help any one else to see it."

The next morning Mr. Fleming rode up to the door ; he was mounted on an ugly spotted broncho. He led Jessie's favorite horse, a thick-built, coal-black Oregon pony. Her little body seemed ready to resist all the powers that be. Her shaggy mane fluttered in the breeze, her bangs hung over her eyes, while her wicked little ears were held close against her head. To the girls so new to ranch-life she seemed a very undesirable animal.

"That beast is a caution," said the ranchman as he waited for Jessie to come out ; "she is so ugly that not a man on the range cares to ride her. She will buck, jump sideways or stiff-legged. She is no good generally ; but when Jess is about, she is almost perfect."

"How many horses have you?" questioned Dr. Ross.

"We use only about fifty on the range," Mr. Fleming replied, "but we will soon send out about a dozen different outfits to represent us at the round-ups. Each cowboy must have at least seven horses, for the hard riding and the sand soon make a pony's back sore. Each outfit must have a mess-wagon and a cook to travel with it."

"You must have a hundred and fifty horses,"

cried Dr. Ross. "I thought that buying one was an important affair."

"It is," said the smiling ranchman.

At that moment Jessie appeared with her hands full of sugar, which the pony ate with great relish.

"Jessie is like wild roses—sweet, but briery," said the uncle.

"Jet is not eating me," laughed Jessie as she sprang into the saddle.

"I fancy she would like to eat you," replied the uncle as he vaulted into his saddle.

The ranchman waved his sombrero by way of a farewell. The riders took a wide circling course in full view of the ranch-house, then rode gayly back to the door. The girls, watching them, wished they too might learn to ride like a Western girl. They took many riding-lessons under the careful tuition of their host. Later they made ready to go down to the park—or, as Jessie styled it, "the cowboys' retreat."

"Jessie, why did you not tell us more of this paradise?" asked Eva.

"Because I wanted you to come and see it for yourselves, and I did not wish you to be disappointed in it;" and Jessie gathered up her paper

flowers, stopping to crumple the petals of a water-lily over the head of her hat-pin.

"I can't understand why you leave it," said Ruth.

"Well, you see, I have a business education," Jessie replied, thoughtfully.

"'Business education,' indeed!" cried the Doctor. "You are the most devoted to fancy-work of any woman here."

"I can't imagine what you mean to do with that stuff," Ruth added, pointing to the paper flowers. "Surely you can't mean to decorate this room with them? How *do* you manage that paper in such air as this?"

Jessie laughed gayly, but made no answer. She surprised the girls by slipping a silver-mounted revolver in her dress-front, leaving the handle to appear as an ornament; then she quickly refilled a pocket match-safe.

"What is that for?" asked the Doctor.

"From force of habit;" and Jessie laughed as she wickedly pulled the ears of two great shepherd-dogs who, seeing these preparations, came close to her. Then she said soberly, "These are carried by uncle's orders; I never leave the house

without them. I quite missed my '45' when I first went to the city."

So all took their way to the willow-shaded nook, while Jessie explained the possibility, though not the probability, of encountering prairie-wolf or rattlesnake, and the science of "back-firing" in case of prairie-fire.

"Jessie, what does 'maverick' mean?" asked Ruth.

"It means an unbranded animal."

"What makes people use such inelegant words?" asked Eva.

"Maverick is not 'inelegant;' it is more appropriate than any other name. Mavericks were named from a man who used to gather up all the unbranded cattle he came across and put his own brand on them; dahlias were named after a Swedish botanist. The principle is the same, unless you believe in the old heathen notion that a thing grows inelegant in proportion as it is useful and necessary to mankind."

The girls went to the willows on Saturday afternoon. Helen Ross swayed back and forth in the swing; Eva, Ruth and Jessie each occupied a hammock; they all talked.

"Girls, I would like to stay at the ranch all the time—if I might have you all with me," said Jessie as she tapped her foot-rest with the toe of her shoe, said foot-rest being one of the great dogs, which had followed her.—"Dr. Ross, don't you think we might manage to have some good times?"

"Glorious!" said the Doctor from her swing.

"Can you think of anything we have done since we have been here?" asked Eva.

"We have made Uncle Jay very happy; we have made some hearts ache; we have *lived*—and clams do that;" and Jessie laughed.

"Do which?" asked the Doctor, turning in her swing and leaning against one of the ropes. "You said that we had made Uncle Jay happy, hearts ache and lived—and clams do that."

"My assertion as to clams shall cover all our doings;" and Jessie laughed again.

"We have been growing healthy, brown and very happy," said the Doctor.

"Now I know!" cried Ruth, who had been taking no part in the conversation.

"Know what?" chorused the girls.

"I told you that I had seen Gospel Ben somewhere," she replied. "Now I remember: he was

in the street-car the night I first went to Mrs. Jewell's. He covered me with his coat when the horses balked and I was nearly frozen."

"Why do you call him 'Gospel Ben'?" asked the Doctor.

"Because he *is* Gospel Ben," Jessie made answer; "he is a minister. Uncle knew him well in the East. His health failed; he had some sort of nervous trouble, I think. He is trying this kind of life in hope of regaining his strength. If I am not mistaken, the pulpit will yet hear from Gospel Ben. You shall listen to him and judge for yourself to-morrow."

"Do you mean to say that you have preaching at the ranch?" asked Ruth.

"Of course we do. Did you think we were beyond the reach of Christianity?"

"No, but it will seem strange to hear a cowboy preach," Ruth replied.

"That depends upon the cowboy," said Jessie, thoughtfully. "They seem to take pride in their cowboyism, but we have several college graduates among our men. We have one doctor, one minister, two lawyers and one ex-editor. They seldom speak of the life they used to live, but they are not dis-

gracing it now. To-morrow two or three of the men will stay with the herds, and the rest will be here promptly at ten-thirty for religious services. Uncle Jay wishes us to sing something for them. Will you, girls?"

"We will try what we can do," said Helen Ross, rising from her swing.

The girls went back to the house, and Jessie sat down before her little organ; the others gathered around. The chief business for the remainder of the day was practicing music for the morrow.

The next morning the hall was in its most perfect order, and a little before the appointed hour for service there was the sound of many hoofs beating the wild turf. Reverently the cowboys filed into the room and took their seats. Mr. Fleming and Jessie stood by the door and shook hands with every man who entered the room. Not only did the Fleming herders come, but every ranch for miles around had sent its delegation. The news of Jessie Fleming's return had traveled swiftly, and every man of them would be willing to ride miles for the sake of holding her plump hand in his own one brief moment, and of seeing her roguish eyes turned full upon him

as he entered the doorway. Then, the cowboy-preacher had never ceased to interest. At first they went to hear him from curiosity, and then they kept on going. Their lives were rough and full of peril, but it is in human nature to be glad to have a praying friend, no matter how sparingly one may indulge in the exercise on one's own account. Who of us but thinks tenderly,

"I had a good old father,
My mother prayed for me"?

So those rough-shirted cowboys gathered at the Fleming ranch to have Gospel Ben "pilot them skyward." They did not object to being instructed by the damsels in the "House Beautiful," though each man carried as many revolvers at his belt as if he knew he should encounter a lion at the gate. The men took care not to swerve one hairsbreadth from the proper cowboy custom: the girls had entered their realm, and pride of calling kept them distinctly cowboys.

It was the first sermon Ruth had heard since she read the little book; she thought the speaker meant it all for her. Through pain and sorrow this Gospel Ben had gotten close to the hearts of mankind.

Poor Gospel Ben labored under difficulties that day. The attention of the masculine part of the audience would rove to the corner by the organ where the four white-robed maidens were sitting. A pair of brown eyes also affected Ben strangely, the eyes were so very brown and so intensely earnest. Their owner appeared to catch his every word. It seemed certain to Gospel Ben that he had known those eyes, and known them well, some time, somewhere.

"It must have been when I was on earth before," he muttered under his breath as the service was over; but Jessie Fleming was saying,

"Gospel Ben, Miss Irving says you saved her life—or, at least, did her some great service—once upon a time."

"I have decided that I must have known Miss Irving in some phase of my existence," replied Gospel Ben as he held Ruth's hand. He held her hand a little longer than was strictly necessary, and Ruth looked smilingly into his puzzled face. "Ah! I remember now. I remember your eyes and the blizzard, the street-car and the balky horse."

"That is an interesting combination of memories," laughed Jessie.

"I wonder by what occult power you controlled those horses?" said Ruth.

Gospel Ben answered only with a smile; some way, Ruth wished he would say something on the subject.

Ruth stood beside Gospel Ben while preacher or ranchman introduced every cowboy present. They all considered themselves personal friends of these young women from that day forth.

It was hard for Ruth to say "Gospel Ben," as Jessie had done, but he seemed to have no other name at the ranch. At length she ceased to wonder, and then the name came readily to her lips.

As Eva Phelps laid her head on her pillow that night she murmured drowsily, "This has been unlike any other day I ever knew," and then a pack of wolves howled dismally in the distance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHOICE AND CIRCUMSTANCE.

"It is not ours to separate
The tangled skein of will and fate,
To show what metes and bounds should stand
Upon the soul's debatable land,
And between choice and circumstance
Divide the circle of events."

A GAIN the ranch-wagon made a trip to the station. The girls impatiently waited for the coming of Mrs. Jewell, Herbert Phelps and Charlie Hills.

"Everybody got hugged but me," said Charlie, dolefully, when the greetings were over and the company had filed into the house.—"Miss Jessie, what will you do with the tenderfoots?"

"Toughen them," Jessie made answer, sententiously, as she took Mrs. Jewell away to rest.

The tenderfoots were shown to Mr. Fleming's room. They saw fit to follow the precedent estab-

lished by the crowned heads of Europe and wear the uniform of the country in which they are visiting; they did their best in the way of cowboy dress, save and excepting the pistol-belt.

Mrs. Jewell was very tired; she retired early. The others spent the evening in relating or listening to stories of Western life. Mr. Fleming promised to call them early in the morning should there be a prospect of a fine mirage at sunrise; they all declared themselves willing to forego their morning nap for the sake of viewing that most wonderful of Nature's pictures.

The people at the ranch were awake and astir long before the sun looked over the plains. In Jessie's room there was the sound of hurried dressing and of quick inquiries as to the lurking-places of button-hooks and the like.

The girls appeared in the sitting-room with the glow of health on their cheeks, the light of health in their eyes. Their plain flannel dresses also enhanced their womanly beauty. There was a moment of merry waiting; then they all clambered into the ranch-wagon and took their way to the bluff-guarded river in the distance. Charlie Hills and Herbert Phelps gloried in the unfamiliar landscape and the

equally unfamiliar dawning lights. Their unaccustomed dress and the revolver tucked in Jessie's dress-front added a touch of daring to it all. The excitement became intense when Charlie caught sight of a prairie-wolf skulking among the shadows of a thick growth of wild sunflowers.

Spread all around was a scene of unequaled grandeur. The view was so wide, yet everything seemed so near! Rivers with tree-tufted banks gleamed in the distance; wide divides bearing innumerable shades of green were spread between. Cattle were walking on a hundred hills. Man and beast breathed a rare, life-giving air. In the east the hues of the rainbow melted into a sky of clearest blue that bent so near and through which one could almost see. The sun shot long splinters of glory across the sky; then his whole face appeared above the plain. The picture slowly faded, leaving only a limited range of prairie covered with ripening grasses.

The ranch-party were at the highest pitch of healthful excitement. It was all so novel! The thin atmosphere was like inspiration.

"This air makes it easy to believe in De Leon's fabled fountain," said Mrs. Jewell.

"I was thinking of the garden of Irem," said the Doctor.

"Talk about climatic influences!" cried Charlie Hills. "A month ago those two ladies were the most sensible people in Nebraska. No wonder it takes seven Eastern men to believe one Western story, for here are Western women accepting yarns that have the sanction of forty generations of Arabian liars."

"Yes, climate has something to do with Western stories," the Doctor replied, gravely, "but still we must not forget to give newspaper-men their share of the credit."

"You 'render unto Cæsar' with a readiness that is startling," said Charlie, laughing.

"These things 'belong unto Cæsar,'" said the Doctor, gayly.

It was a hungry party that gathered around the breakfast-table that morning: the Western air is a wonderful stimulant for the digestive organs.

After breakfast Gospel Ben brought the ponies, and riding-lessons were the order of the day. Charlie Hills tried to follow all the suggestions made by Mr. Fleming, Jessie and Gospel Ben; in so doing he managed to get himself thrown over a

spotted broncho's hateful head. Mrs. Jewell nearly went wild with apprehension. Dr. Ross expressed the opinion that when she bought a horse it should be an animal that had enjoyed a Christian training. Mr. Phelps retained his place in the saddle, for, thanks to his boyhood's farm-life, he had a good knowledge of equine matters.

As Charlie joined the ladies after his attempt at broncho-riding he said laughingly,

"My respect for the cowboys is rising fast. How they control those beasts is more than I can understand. I should rather tackle the traditional evil spirit of the printing-office."

The little ponies proved to be an interesting study; Mr. Fleming affirmed that he could tell much of an animal's temper and disposition from the creature's color and markings.

Before the morning was over, Herbert and Charlie had become Gospel Ben's firm friends; they thought him an odd and pleasing character. Mr. Fleming invited Gospel Ben to take dinner at his house, and the whole party added their entreaties to his invitation.

After dinner Mrs. Jewell and the young women brought out various sorts of vacation-work; they

declared that they were going to be very quiet that afternoon. Ranchman and cowboy took their male city-friends away to visit the herds beyond the corral. When they returned, Charlie Hills reported that their enjoyment was equaled only by the size of the country.

Those people were all wildly, carelessly happy. Forms long used to standing firmly under heavy burdens shook with happy laughter. Mr. Fleming invited his guests to stay with him for ever, but they gently and firmly declined to do so. The house-keeper, who long had been used to the loneliness of ranch-life, laid by a stock of memories sufficient to enliven another ten years of solitude. As for the cowboys, this was the beginning of a new era with them; they reckoned time, past, present or future, by its relation to the time "they were here."

With sympathetic interest Helen Ross listened to the story of the little book, and of how Ruth had found that she had a home and a Father's loving care all very sure. This medical-woman had felt the burden of Ruth's unbelief and of her love-affair; she found that things had all gone right, though she had not ordered their going. Her heart was very thankful. They talked of Ruth's

medical studies in the most matter-of-fact way. These things should surely be. A doctor's life was such a wide, full life! There were many opportunities for grand, patient work; Ruth wanted such work to do. They planned to study together and to make the most of Ruth's little savings. For Ruth had paid her debts and had established a bank-account; she was earning what seemed to her a great deal of money. She had said nothing to Herbert Phelps of all her planning and her saving; so it was that he did not know of her desire to write "M. D." after her name. Ruth was not aware of the fact that Mr. Phelps disapproved of woman-doctors.

There was very little strolling off by twos during the ranch-visit; Mr. Fleming insisted that one or more of the cowboys should accompany the ladies on their little trips about the ranch.

Gospel Ben had been appointed a standing committee on entertainment. He was fond of botany and of what Jessie called "bugology;" he had a great many prairie-secrets which he delighted in betraying. He formed a class in natural history. Ruth proved to be a more untiring student than was Dr. Ross herself. The girl began later; she wanted

to learn everything all at once. Gospel Ben was very patient with her ignorance.

It was the last afternoon at the ranch. Gospel Ben had gone to the station ; the others went to the willows to lounge once more in the shade. The next dawn would find the visitors far on their way to the station, and the ranch-visit would have passed into history.

The afternoon slipped away ; long shadows reminded all of specimens and things which must be packed. They strolled back to the house by twos. Herbert Phelps planned that Ruth and he should be the last couple to leave the spot. They lingered a short time, and Ruth told the story of the little book which had helped her so much. Herbert gave her a warm, strong hand as the story closed. Then Ruth told of her plans in life—how she was to study medicine with Dr. Ross. Herbert's face grew more sober as Ruth went on. Could he tell her how he dreaded to have her undertake such work ? She was such a slight little woman ! He would like her to have a pleasant life and few cares.

"Are you sure you could endure it ?" he asked.

"I know you are energetic and business-like, but, after all that, you are a home-woman. I think you would be happier in a home of your own than with ever so great a mission outside. Can you have both?"

The two were walking slowly toward the house. Herbert savagely cut off the wild-grass heads with a cottonwood cane which he carried in his hand. Ruth's eyes were watching the falling heads. She knew the path she had chosen would be a weary one, but she felt strong just then. She answered firmly; she thought she meant what she said:

"I am not like other women; I was made for this outside work. I do not care about a 'home of my own.' I never shall marry; that subject is not to be considered in my plans."

Ruth raised her eyes. A spotted broncho was bounding across the divide; the shape of the rider's strong shoulders, the poise of the well-set head, were familiar to Ruth. She stopped involuntarily and watched the horse and its rider. Waves of scarlet swept over her cheeks, her brow, and tinged the sun-browned neck with pink.

"Oh, Herbert, I can't help it!" she cried, then turned and fled down the path toward the willows.

Herbert Phelps was no more surprised at this conduct than was Ruth herself, but it took him some minutes to think it over. At last he comprehended it all. "Women *are* queer!" he muttered. "After all, Ruth and I are quits. I think I will tell her something else, though." He went back to the willows; he found Ruth sitting very still, with her face buried in her hands. He laid his hand on her bowed head and said gently,

"You did not let me finish what I wanted to say. It was about the medical education. I think if you begin it you will make a success of it. See here: your big brother is going to make you a present now. It is the first one, you know."

Ruth raised her eyes. Herbert held a blue-covered pocket-Bible in his hands, and was marking it. Then she read the words which he had underscored: "For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not: I will help thee."

Herbert placed the book in Ruth's hand, and then they went back along the path through the ripening grasses to the ranch-house.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWOS.

“To hear, to heed, to wed—

Fair lot that maidens choose.”

THERE was a wedding in the boarding-house. During a moment of waiting for the bridal-party Ruth glanced around the parlor; she thought, “Not one married pair in the room!” With some “a little more had made earth heaven” and then slipped away from their lives.

Mrs. Jewell’s widow’s dress was brightened only by white roses at her breast. Charlie Hills stood with arms tightly folded over his chest; Ruth wondered if he thought of the bride over whose grave the bright leaves drifted that autumn day.

This was a pretty wedding—very commonplace, of course, for these young people married because they loved each other; with youth, health and hope they would set up their household gods. In such weddings rests the future of our nation. They only

have the shortest possible notice in the evening paper, and the shortness is something for which to be grateful.

The boarding-house parlor was bright with sunshine, the air sweet with the scent of flowers. Sincere friends came with good wishes for the young couple. A wedding-breakfast was served in the dining-room. A bar of sunlight struggled through the geranium-leaves in the large window and fell upon the bride, turning her yellow hair into coils of gold. She went back to her old room for the last time. Her girl-friends all helped while she changed the white bridal-dress for a blue traveling-suit. The black gowns worn in memory of John Anderson's death had been put away: frost had touched the forget-me-nots on his grave.

The assembled company were waiting for the carriages that were to take the bridal-pair to the station. As is usual on such occasions, all were uncertain whether they ought to laugh or to cry. The bride did neither; as for the bridegroom, he was the happiest man in the world.

Jessie Fleming swung an old slipper in her hand. Ruth Irving moved about with a basin of rice, from which they all took a handful to throw after the

departing bride. Jay Fleming, who had been summoned from the ranch to attend the wedding, dextrously scattered grains of rice in the bride's hat-trimming. Charlie Hills seated himself at the piano; he carefully placed an old shoe on the floor beside him.

"Oh, Mr. Hills, can't you play something for me?" said Eva, with just a little tremble in her voice.

"That is right, Charlie; give us some music," said Mr. Phelps.

"This selection seems to be just in the spirit of this meeting," said Charlie, gravely, as he began to play in a style decidedly Charlieish; then they recognized the strains of "Still there's More to Follow."

"The carriage is coming," cried Dr. Ross.

"Mrs. Jewell, where is your bonnet?" asked Eva.

"I shall bid my girl good-bye here in my own home; I dislike to say farewell with strangers looking on;" and Mrs. Jewell took another mother's child in her arms and kissed her many times. That might have been her own daughter had God been willing.

The young husband and the young wife went down the walk amid a storm of superannuated shoes and Carolina rice. After them went Herbert Phelps and Helen Ross; they took their places in the carriage with the "happy pair," while Charlie wickedly sang,

" 'More and more, more and more—
Always more to follow.' "

"Ruthie, will you come back and spend the day with me?" asked Mrs. Jewell.

"I will, for I am not going to my patient until to-morrow morning," replied Ruth.

Ruth spent the day at the boarding-house; Dr. Ross took supper there. All did their best to make believe they were not lonely, but as the Doctor prepared to go out Mrs. Jewell begged:

"Do stay with us, Doctor! Will you not fill our vacant chair?"

"Two of my patients *must* be seen to-night," was the answer; whereupon Herbert Phelps offered to go around to the stable for the Doctor's horse. He soon appeared with the new rig, and after helping Helen into her phaeton took a seat beside her and gathered up the reins with the air of a man who in-

tends to fight it out on that line if it takes seven years.

Ruth's eyes told Mrs. Jewell that she was surprised and delighted, and Mrs. Jewell answered by a look which said that she had suspected this all along, also that she approved of it.

Mrs. Jewell was occupied with her household cares. Charlie Hills and Jessie Fleming held a conference in the hall, and then disappeared among the shadows of a starlit night. The other boarders went their several ways.

Mr. Fleming called Mrs. Jewell and Ruth to the veranda ; they wrapped themselves in shawls and told each other that Nebraska certainly has the clearest starlight in the world.

Mr. Fleming had been something of a surprise to them all. They had vaguely expected a ranchman—perhaps sombrero, pistol-belt and all ; to their delight, there appeared before them a fine figure clad in a city-made dress-suit with all the accessories which the latest fashion demands. Every one said Mr. Fleming was a fine-looking man. Those two women sitting in the moonlight thought so.

The grocer's emissary passed up the sidewalk and around to the kitchen door. Mrs. Jewell went out

to give orders for the next day's provisions ; when she would return to her friends, they were slowly walking back and forth in the long veranda. She paused midway in the parlor ; then she softly murmured, " Yes, I thought so !" The shadows which fell across the window-sill showed two heads bent thoughtfully forward. Mrs. Jewell raised her right hand solemnly, as if in blessing ; then she tossed a kiss after the retreating figures. Returning to the dining-room and sitting in the moonlight, her memory went back to her long-gone girlhood ; she felt again the presence of the man she had married one starlit evening years before, and whose last narrow home was on the bluffs to the west. Even the most skeptical of us sometimes feel the nearness of those who now are only memories.

Out there in the moonlight Ruth was listening while the lawyer-ranchman argued his case as he never had done in the old days before judge or jury. The temptation to say " Yes " was as great as the pleader knew how to make it. Mr. Fleming was offering her a home and the petting and ease that a generous, loving heart and plenty of money can command ; why not marry him ? The clear, soft light showed Ruth an honest face ; she was honest

with him. There was one reason why : she did not love him.

What do you mean by that word "love"—*the* love which sanctifies the marriage relation? Ruth knew that Mr. Fleming was a noble man worthy of a good wife. She loved him well enough to enjoy seeing his face across the breakfast-table, cheerfully to order his house and for his sake to take upon herself many homely duties. Yes, but that is only a part of what true love means. Why not take the home he offered her? Marrying for money is quite right in the eyes of the world. Ruth did want a home so much ! Six weeks of watching had somewhat worn the gloss off her dreams ; they were not so bright as when, full of health and energy, she stood under the cottonwoods beside Herbert Phelps.

In Ruth's heart was the memory of that fair prairie-scene. A single spotted broncho bounded across the divide, and the broncho's rider settled it all. Ruth did not perjure her soul : the large-hearted ranchman must go back to his lonely home and to the rooms peopled by the ghosts of his dreams.

Ruth went home with Helen Ross that night ;—

she sat in the same easy-chair in which she had rested the last December, and oh, she was so tired and discouraged ! The victorious often are.

Do you call it a little victory ? Was the temptation a little one ? Ask any woman who has fought the world and knows the dangers along her way. After all, living is a serious business for even the most highly-favored of us.

That night Ruth read the second chapter of Revelation ; she lingered a little over the words " my faithful martyr ;" she smiled as she read of the " white stone " and the " new name," for she remembered who it was that said, " For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not ; I will help thee ;" " Fear not ; for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine."

Ruth felt very sure that she would be among those who have overcome, for up there note is taken of bloodless wars and of victories of peace.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HARDER TASK OF STANDING STILL.

“For one shall grasp and one resign,
One drink life’s rue and one life’s wine,
And God shall make the balance good.”

IN the elegant room where Beulah Andrus lay slowly dying another victory was gained that day. Beulah had thought so much of the future which never could be hers, but which Ruth Irving might enjoy, but oh, this task of standing still, of seeing others take life’s good things, or else of folding them away in a paper marked “My last will and testament”! Beulah was half glad to send Ruth away to attend a happier girl’s wedding while she set her house in order for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom. All day long she lay very quietly; she expressed few wishes to the house-keeper, who acted as nurse in Ruth’s absence.

When night came on, Mr. Andrus sat by his daughter and tried to pet away some of her pain.

There was a wonderful sympathy between that strong father and the dying daughter. No other voice was so sweet as his to her ears, no other hands were so tender, no one else could so quickly understand her slightest wish.

"How is my darling to-night?" Mr. Andrus asked, giving Beulah little mother-like kisses.

"Easier just now, papa, and I want to talk to you."

"You shall talk as much as you like, my one darling," he said, tenderly; "we will sit here in this lovely moonlight all alone."

The housekeeper left father and daughter together; then Beulah said,

"Raise me up, papa; let me lean my head against your heart. Papa, what I say will hurt you, but please don't mind it; for my sake don't think of the hurt."

"I can bear anything for you, Beulah," he said, thinking sadly of the time when there would be nothing more to do for his only child.

"I have money, have I not, papa?"

"Yes, my darling; you are my only heir."

"I did not mean that," she said, "but mamma's money; that is mine?"

"The day you are twenty-one your mother's fortune will be made over to you, and you will have full control of it."

"I shall be twenty-one to-morrow."

"Yes, but I can hardly realize it, my little one. How shall we celebrate your majority?"

"I shall make my will."

The young girl said it slowly, as if deliberately weighing every word.

"Oh, my Beulah!" and the father's arms began to tighten around her.

"You are rich; you don't need this money, papa."

"Not the money, dear one, but I need you;" and the pressure of his arms almost made her cry out with pain.

"Yes, I want to make my will to-morrow," Beulah went on. "I have set my heart on this thing, papa. You know something that I wanted has been withheld from me; with all your wealth, I must die with my heart's desire ungratified unless I can do it in this way."

"Oh, my darling," the father groaned, "I said I would not give you up, and now God is taking you from me."

Hot tears fell on Beulah's face, while sobs shook the breast on which she leaned.

"Don't grieve so, papa. You were right; I see it now. I could not do it. My hands are too little; they were always too weak. But Ruth Irving can do it. I want her to have my money; I want her to do my work. It will be easier to die if I know that she will do it. I want to make my will, and then tell her all about it. Oh, papa, she *must* do it! It is hard to die with one's heart's desire ungratified."

"Everything shall be just as you wish, my one darling," the father promised.

Early in the morning the lawyer came, and Beulah Andrus made her will. There were little gifts for friends, something for each of the servants, and then the mother's fortune was willed, without condition, to the motherless Ruth Irving. Mr. Andrus and his friend were called in to witness the signature, and the lawyer said pompously,

"Mr. Andrus, you should read this will before she signs it."

"This is my daughter's will," he replied, sternly, as he bent to support the sick girl while she feebly wrote her name.

At last the lawyer was gone, and the anxious father bathed Beulah's face and fanned her gently, greatly fearing that the excitement would prove too much for her.

"Was it enough, darling? Are you sure that money will do all you wish?"

"Yes, papa; and Ruth Irving will soon be a comparatively rich woman. Now, darling papa, I give you my best love for ever and the knowledge that I die with my heart's desire fully gratified. Papa, darling papa, always remember that there was not the least little thing you could do for me that you left undone."

That night, when Ruth sat by the bed, Beulah said,

"I want to talk about myself to-night; may I, Ruth?"

"Certainly you may," Ruth replied.

"Then sit close to me; hold my hand. There! So! I want to tell you about my plans which proved abortive, my wants which wealth could not gratify. You know that I was at school in an Eastern city when I was taken sick. In that place I met a Christian gentleman who had come to

America to study our civilization, that he might go home and teach his own people—a heathen race—of the faith in Christ and the good it has brought to the world. Hearing him tell of the degradation of our sister-women over the seas made it seem more real to me than it had ever been before. I learned that the surest way to reach them is for Christian women to go as doctors, and while working for their bodies try to help their souls. I wanted to do that very work. I always wanted to do something big in the world, but oh, my hands are so little and so weak ! I planned for a medical education. I wrote papa all about it. He forbade me to think of such a thing ; he said he would never give me up. I love papa dearly, but I thought God wanted me to do that work for him. I grieved so over papa's refusal ! I worked so hard over my studies, hoping all the time that he would consent. I grew frailer continually, but I was so absorbed in my work that I did not notice it, though I knew I had my mother's constitution. One day I fainted in the class-room. It was such a weary while before I was strong enough to be brought home ! Papa has done everything for me, but it is of no use. I mourned so that I must leave my work undone ! I

mourned until you came, and then I began to think how I might yet be able to have my heart's desire. There is one way, and you must help me in that. I know this is the kind of work you long for ; I know you have more ability for this work than I ever could have had. I made my will this morning ; I have given you the money which could not satisfy my life's ambition. I planned confidently, for I know these thoughts are in your heart. This money will educate you and place you above the need of working for your living. I want you to go much among the lowest poor. I do not think of you as a foreign missionary ; I think you are too intensely American for that. There is work for you in our own land among our degraded, discouraged sisters. Tell them I loved them, Ruthie ; tell them I loved them because Christ died for them. Tell them I would have left all my luxury and gone to them and tried to help them to purity and peace, hope and happiness ; but tell them I died trusting Jesus. Tell them that when dying I sent you to them—I sent you to do my work for me. It is all settled ; my father will be your guardian. Don't cry so, Ruthie, for we shall each gain her heart's desire."

The moonlight filled the room as it had flooded the veranda where, twenty-four hours before, Ruth Irving had declined to sell herself for gold, and had turned wearily to the work she meant to do for God. The friend slipping away from life had put out her hand, and this was God's way of making "crooked places straight." Ruth felt a strange security, for the words "my father will be your guardian" were the sweetest part of her inheritance.

A few more days, and soft white folds floated from the Andrus door-bell. A white coffin was carried into the front parlor.

Ruth Irving watched over Beulah's dreamless sleep; she thought, as she bound the yellow hair around the head that rested at last, how the gold-like threads were fit emblem of the glory in store for God's enduring children.

Ruth Irving left that silent form as a prophet might return from a walk with God. She had her lifelong inspiration; thereafter her work would be the echo of that dying charge, "Tell them I died trusting Jesus. Tell them he died for them; tell them I loved them because he died for them."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE COLLEGE IN THE DESERT.

"Where thy life can serve him best
He hath set thee ; only rest,
And his purpose thou shalt see."

RUTH went about her studies with the enthusiasm of a noble purpose. With the beginning of the next college-year she entered an Eastern college. The ensuing four years were the happiest, the most care-free, of her life, as college-years are of any earnest life, filled as they are with hard work, pleasant friendships and grand plans.

Nearly every week brought letters from Ruth's Western friends—her home-friends, she always called them. Near the end of her junior year one of Herbert's letters contained a newspaper-cutting which told how a convict in a certain prison had attacked the guard ; how another prisoner had thrown himself between them, receiving himself the blow meant for the guard, and from the effects of

which he died in a few hours. This was Ruth Irving's father. A deep scarlet burned in her cheeks as she thought of the shame his life had been, but that wicked life had blossomed into one brave deed, and he was dead. She had grieved over his life; she grieved over his death. She had but little daughterly love for him, and it was his own fault. The shame of it all! There were times when it almost broke her heart. She went on with her work; she kept her own heart pure; she made her own life helpful to others: that was the best and all she could do.

It was nearly the close of Ruth's senior year. She picked up an evening paper and looked over the church notices for the next day. This was the first notice:

"The Rev. Benjamin Maynard, former pastor of the First Church, will preach in his old pulpit to-morrow morning. Subject, 'The College in the Desert.' It will be remembered that Mr. Maynard resigned his pastorate on account of failing health. We congratulate him on his restoration to health, and welcome him to our city."

Ruth was pleased. She had heard of the Rev.

Benjamin Maynard ; she was sure that she should enjoy listening to him. She was a little puzzled at his subject ; it kept coming back to her. She taught in Sunday-school ; she did a great deal of missionary work for First Church.

The sweet organ-voluntary was sounding as the preacher moved down the aisle. The peculiar poise of his handsome head, the swinging motion of the strong shoulders, seemed familiar to Ruth. Where had she seen the Rev. Benjamin Maynard ? Where had she seen that face with its broad brow, kind eyes and dark beard cut after the General Grant pattern ?

The organ ceased its sobbing ; the preacher rose in the pulpit and pronounced the invocation. At the sound of his voice memory ran riot in Ruth's brain, to the exclusion of the opening prayer. That voice had controlled the balky horses on the night of the blizzard—a night memorable for many reasons ; the hands so devoutly folded over the big Bible had covered her with their owner's fur coat, and had also grubbed sand-burs out of the path to the willows. Then the long weeks at the ranch, when she had constantly met this cowboy-preacher,

and he was the first minister with whom she had ever felt acquainted. Then the last night at the ranch, when she had lingered in the twilight with Herbert Phelps. They had returned to the house to find Gospel Ben making his farewell call ; she yet stood outside the door when he took her hand and wished her a pleasant journey. She had answered laughingly ; then, while the others were busy with the moon and the stars, Gospel Ben had again taken her hand in his and said softly, "God keep you !" Then he had disappeared among the shadows. The Rev. Benjamin Maynard was just "Gospel Ben."

The service went on. Ruth Irving was a fashionably-dressed, devout young lady. No one in all that eminently respectable congregation imagined that this brilliant young medical student saw nothing but a wild prairie-scene, a single spotted broncho and a strong rider, or that the minister so gracefully conducting their worship saw again the low room, the rough-shirted cowboys and the four white-robed girls in the corner by the organ, and that he looked again into the clear brown eyes he had pictured a thousand times in Western twilights.

The sermon began, and Ruth forgot everything else. There was a picture of the "desert-place"

where long ago "He began teaching them many things." Then the speaker turned to the desert-places in human lives like yours and mine. The language was very simple; a child might have understood it all. He said :

"Now, my people—once you were my people, and I see in your friendly faces that you will pardon a few words about myself—you remember how we said 'Good-bye' when I went away in search of mental rest and health. I had gone in and out before you. You knew my ways; many of you knew me better than I knew myself. You knew how ambitious I was. Sometimes I fear I was more concerned about the success of my reverend self than about my Master's glory. God came near taking the intellect in which I gloried. I gave up study, my chief hope being to keep enough brains to enable me to stay outside the insane asylum. The prodigal came to himself while feeding swine; I returned to my God while riding a spotted broncho, herding Texan cattle. I said, 'Now, Lord, I know I was all wrong. I don't want a corner on this preaching business any more; I don't care about having my sermons telegraphed all over this continent. But, dear Lord, please let me do a little

something for thee. Dear Lord, will you not keep this pain and muddled feeling out of my head when I try to think? Then I will get the boys together under the big cottonwood next Sunday morning. We will sing thy praises and maybe say a few words for thee.' The good Lord seemed to like that. We had a little praise-meeting. The next Sunday I talked and the boys listened. We kept on with our meetings; men came from other ranches. Though cowboys have the name of being a 'bad lot,' we worshiped God one day in seven, and sometimes talked of him during the week. Out there they call me 'Gospel Ben.' I like that name; I hope God will call me by it when I get to heaven.

"It is a grand thing to be a messenger of 'good news.' Men and women, this is the message: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Perhaps God wants some of you to carry this message to his creatures. We get full of our small ambitions; we have no room for anything else. Then God calls us to the 'desert.' For every life has some 'desert-place.' I thank God for the 'desert-place;' I thank him for taking me to those grand prairies. There he began teaching me many things. The college in the desert—there

is the highest teaching this side of heaven. Christ went to the desert with a heavy human sorrow in his heart; he was tired. Weariness is sometimes harder to endure than sharp pain. But Christ went right on living for others, just as he would have us live for others in this school where Faith and Hope, Love and Pain, are teaching. The graduated classes are with him—up yonder.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOGETHER.

“Part of my soul, I seek thee, and thee claim
My other half.”

ONE stormy morning, six weeks later, Ruth sat in a willow rocker and idly toyed with her watch-chain ; her visitor sat in a huge self-rocker and leaned his head back lazily, unmindful of tidies and other such abominations. She was saying,

“So Charlie Hills is your Sunday-school superintendent? Is he as odd as he used to be?”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Maynard ; “I am sorry to say that men as noble as he are still considered odd.”

“I think it is worth one’s while to be odd,” said Ruth. “I always liked Charlie. Tell me more about him ; he never mentions himself in his letters.”

“He never talks of himself,” said Mr. Maynard ; “he seldom speaks of the past, only as connected

with yours. I confess he has told me a great deal about that ; he always found me a willing listener."

"He writes strange letters," Ruth went on ; she was very much interested in those letters. "From them I know all about the manners, morals and politics of your town, the newest settlers, the Indian question, the temperance question, the tinting of the sky at the last sunset or the state of the town sidewalks ; but there is very little about Charlie Hills. I wonder why he never mentioned you in his letters ? He often mentioned 'the preacher,' but I never guessed 'the preacher' was Gospel Ben."

"Ah ! but he *is* Gospel Ben ;" and that gentleman rose up and walked to the window. "Miss Irving, does this blizzard remind you of our first ride together, or have you forgotten that street-car?"

"I have not forgotten. That night I entered Mrs. Jewell's house for the first time ; I found my best friends that day."

"Who was that young giant with you ? I don't think I have seen him since."

"That was John Anderson ; he died that Christmas-time."

Ruth's voice was very gentle ; John Anderson's memory grew dearer to her as the years went by.

"Ah? I have heard Mrs. Jewell speak of him. I am glad you told me; I like to think that I saw John Anderson." Then Mr. Maynard added, "Miss Irving, do you know that I never took so much comfort in performing another marriage-ceremony as in the one which changed Mrs. Jewell's name? Mr. and Mrs. Fleming are a well-mated couple."

Mr. Maynard was tired of this small-talk; he had resolved to begin a new subject before he went back to his Western home. He returned to his chair and tried to collect his wits. He looked at the elegant woman before him; he admired the soft, silky-looking dress she wore. He wondered how many such robes his salary for a year could buy, let alone paying rent-, coal-, grocery- and meat-bills. He thought how uncertain (humanly speaking) is a home missionary's bread and butter; he thought how near this woman was to wearing a coveted title. She made such a pretty picture sitting there! Would she send him away alone? If so, the cruelest fate must be more than satisfied.

"The other blizzard brought good things to us both; shall this one be remembered for still greater happiness? Ruth, I need you; shall we work together?"

Mr. Maynard thought his words told nothing at all of the great love and tenderness he longed to bestow upon Ruth Irving; his voice meant a great deal. Ruth had studied voices.

Ruth was straightforward and honest, just as she had always been; her voice was firm and low as she repeated the words of Ruth of old:

“‘Thy people shall be my people.’”

And Mr. Maynard added,

“‘The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.’”

The historian will not meddle further. There are times when one prays—often when two pray—to be delivered from friends; and modern dinners pale before the nectar and ambrosia of the gods.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WEIGHTY WORK.

“ Would you have chosen ease, and so
Have shunned the fight? God honored you
With trust of weighty work. And oh,
The Captain of the heavens knew
His trusted soldier would prove true.”

THE unending changes of Western life have taken these friends of ours away from Omaha.

Jessie Fleming went to an Eastern home, gayly maintaining that she never had obeyed, and never should obey, anybody ; and her husband smiled well content.

In a busy little town Charlie Hills “ moulds public opinion ” by printing a paper of his own. He still calls the world beautiful, still makes his life helpful to others. Sorrow has come to him again : his little daughter “ is not.” The people in that new town regard him as a chronic case of bachelorism, for he never repeats the story he told for Ruth’s sake that day so long ago.

Herbert Phelps changed his location in that most indefinite region "Out West." He has found the one face which completes his home-picture. By the door of his new house there hangs the sign,

H. A. ROSS-PHELPS, M. D.

His old prejudices went down before love for the young medical-woman who, with all her outside work, lost none of her sweet home-charms. For his sake Dr. Ross packed away the dear old sign—her father's sign and hers. Love will conquer the world at last.

Ruth Irving-Maynard's home is in another Western town. This one is neither brisk nor bustling; over all its miserable ways and its unthrifty homes may be read the story of the broken hearts and the abortive hopes of a race. This town is in the Indian Territory.

Yes, the red man has reddened the earth with the white man's blood. Before you judge him take down your Greek or Roman or French or English history; read a little and think much. The whole earth is red with innocent blood spilled by the

royal houses of Europe; they, with the simple North American savage, will one day stand before the same Judge and on the same level. John Anderson's great pity for this failing people and Beulah Andrus's desire to help degraded womanhood turned Ruth Irving's thoughts toward this wretched race. Her thoughts grew to purpose, and that purpose was strengthened by the earnest words of such noble writers as Helen Hunt Jackson and William Justin Harsha.

Only two buildings in all that tired-looking village have escaped the brand of discouragement. There is a home-like cottage, and near it is a little church.

Dr. Ruth Maynard walked quickly along the village street; she opened her cottage door and entered a room whose furnishings suggested parlor, dining-room, office and study. She had the old skillful ways; her eyes had the eager light of her girlhood. She passed on to the little kitchen, where an Indian girl was preparing some vegetables for dinner.

The cooking was going forward rapidly when a horseman rode by the door and stopped before the barn in the rear of the house. Ruth dropped her

egg-beater and hurried to meet the rider as he sprang to the ground ; he stooped to kiss the little woman. She watched while the horse was cared for ; then hand in hand they went back to the house. Gospel Ben drew his wife to his knee, and between laughter and kisses she searched for the letters she hoped to find in his pocket. At last she drew out one, exclaiming,

“ You are my Gospel Ben—my Good-News Ben ! Oh, this is Herbert’s writing.”

“ I hope I have brought you good news, wifie ?” said Gospel Ben as he bent his head until his cheek touched Ruth’s ; so they read the letter together.

The letter finished, Ruth cried,

“ ‘ Ruth Benja Phelps ’ ! That is just like them. Helen’s baby ! How I want to see her ! ”

Then the missionary-doctor went about arranging her dinner-table. All the while she talked of the new baby and the new baby’s future ; her husband listened with the air of a man who considers himself very well satisfied with life.

There was a noise at the door, and in walked Flying Eagle. Sad and stern, he has come to see if this wonderful white woman can save his son’s life. It is his last hope. The boy must be saved :

his parents love him. The father said the doctor might have his only pony if she would but see the boy ; Ruth explained that the pony would more than pay for the trip, and agreed to doctor the boy if the father would work for her. Then she invited Flying Eagle to eat dinner with her. Remember, she follows Him who ate with "publicans and sinners."

The Indian feared to offend the wonderful doctor ; for the first time in his life he sat by a white man's table. He tried to act like his host ; he ended in failure and admiration for Gospel Ben, the wonderful white woman and a picture on the wall. For Beulah Andrus's face looked down on them. The artist had done her work well and pictured the delicate tinting of brow and cheek, the clear blue of the eyes and the coils of yellow hair.

Ruth told the story of the yellow-haired girl who loved the souls of the dark people and would have given her life for them—how, dying, she sent Dr. Ruth in her stead. The red man could believe that, for the medicine-woman was living and working for them. When the dinner and the story were over, Ruth mounted her pony and with Gospel Ben followed Flying Eagle to his wretched home.

And Ruth? Are her old questions answered? Can she solve the problem of "surplus" humanity? She has learned this much: none are surplus in the good Father's love, and he knows the end; so she bravely goes her way and in that "Land of Fire" works for the salvation of a people whom our law-makers seem to consider "surplus."

To the Northern Indians this region is the "Land of Fire." There they live in homesickness for the free wind, the rare, electrified air and the bright prairie stretching away to meet the sky in the distance. Oh, that "Land of Fire," where medicine both for soul and body is so sorely needed, where the wearing cough of consumption is sounding the doom of a proud race! They are very bitter, very cynical; bitterly they hate their white brothers, for here is the cruelest despotism within the proudest republic on earth. It is weary work overcoming prejudices and teaching God's wild children that the white woman can love them, the white man work for their souls and their bodies. Little by little victories of peace are gained; more and more often the red woman comes for the white woman's cough-syrup; more and more often Ruth holds the fever-stricken Indian babies in her arms; more and

more often the red man listens while Gospel Ben tells the story of the gentle Saviour whom the great Father sent to a failing people long ago, and how his bright blood was shed for the red man as well as for the white man.

The red man sits on a fallen tree and looks at his thin fingers. He listens to the wearing cough which sounds in his dug-out. He thinks if ever the white man loved his red brother he has been a long time showing that love; but maybe the Great Spirit will make it all right in the end.

THE END.

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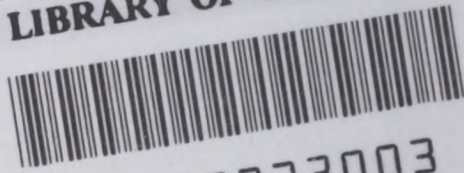
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